

Letters

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Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 22 June 1964

One should not reproach a science for not being what it does not want to be or for not providing what it does not want to provide. In this respect one should not criticize modern chemistry insofar as it studies the phenomena it intends to study, for on its limited plane it remains within adequation and is not exceeding its strengths; nor can one blame it for remaining within the strictly human perspective in relation to matter, for it need not go beyond this point, and indeed no physical science needs to do so.

This last point is of capital importance, and it allows me to mention the following: the universe of an insect does not interest us, for this perspective is peripheral whereas ours is central, so that all we need to know is that lower perspectives exist; our perspective must contain that of the insect and even that of the plant in a certain manner. As for the world of an angel, this perspective differs from ours only insofar as the angel does not intervene in human affairs; in itself it is derived from the universal essences—which no sensible man will attempt to “imagine”—but when it is correlated with the human world the angelic perspective makes itself human; the angel sees us as we see each other when he has a reason to look at us; and on the same level he sees the universe as we see it.

Since “limitation” does not mean “falsehood”, the specific limitation of the human state is completely separate from the question of scientific errors. For one of two things: either we are God, and then we are aware of pure and total Reality, or else we are not God, and then our vision of things is limited, as is the object of our vision; a cosmic science “at the level of God” would be an absurdity. Nonetheless the possibility of adequation exists at our level: if we say that two plus two equals four, this is true; if we say that two plus two equals five, this is false, and the abyss between the two assertions is absolute. Either I know what is behind me, or I do not; if I know there is a tree five meters behind me, my science is adequate for what it intends to include; the question of the metaphysical meaning of the tree or the “horizontal” limitation of all knowledge is irrelevant; and if I believe my tree is the only tree there is or if I deny that it can flower when in fact it can, then it is not my momentary and concrete science of the tree that is false but the hypothesis I pinned to it; this is more or less what happens with modern science. Therefore, when it comes to determining the value of a given opinion of this science, there is no need at all to resort to the argument of the ontological limitation of the human mind, for traditional men also give their sciences an objective scope; all we need to know is whether in fact modern science is wrong on the plane it is studying or whether any of its claims are unwarranted.

Modern science is only partially wrong on the plane of physical facts; on the other hand it is totally wrong on higher planes and in its principles. It is wrong in its negations and in the false principles derived from them, then in the erroneous hypotheses deduced from these principles, and finally in the monstrous effects this science produces as a result of its initial Prometheanism. But it is right about many physical data and even about some psychological facts, and indeed it is impossible for this not to be so, given the law of compensations; in other words it is impossible for modern men not to be right on certain points where ancient men were wrong; this is even part of the mechanism of degeneration.

What is decisive in favor of the ancients or traditional men in general, however, is that they are right about all the spiritually essential points.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of February 1976

Regarding the question of transubstantiation, which I address briefly in *Logic and Transcendence*, the Oriental character of the words in question can be seen in their use of ellipsis: Christ did not say, “I am like a vine, like a door”, but he said, “I am the vine, the door”; likewise he did not say, “This conveys divine power in the same way my body conveys divine power”, but he said, “This is my body”. In the formula of consecration, “this” can mean “that which, having been consecrated, is no longer bread pure and simple but bread infused with the divine presence or power, even as my body is infused with this presence or power, so that in practical terms there is no longer any difference between them; hence this is my body.” But the formula of consecration does not necessarily refer to “that which has all the appearances of bread”. Such an interpretation of the pronoun “this” is a theological commentary, no doubt necessary from the point of view of a certain psychological expediency—in the broadest and most profound sense of the term—but nonetheless limited from the purely metaphysical point of view. Be that as it may, the fact that Christ did not specify “this bread” but instead used a pronoun does not mean that he wished to say that this bread is no longer bread; in a similar way the fact that the voice of the Father did not specify “this real man” during the baptism of Christ but instead used a pronoun —“this” in Matthew and “thou” in Mark and Luke—does not mean that He intended to claim that this man is not a real man, as certain monophysites believed.

What Christ said can be interpreted as follows: “Just as divine power dwells within my body, so it now dwells within this bread; and just as my body, which conveys divine power, is not a body like others, so for the same reason this bread is no longer bread like other bread.” Hindus, whose dialectic readily uses antinomies, would say that the consecrated host is “neither bread nor non-bread”, but Semitic and Western alternativism requires definitions that are simple, exclusive, and dogmatically employable, hence devoid of nuances that are psychologically dangerous for the average man.

Even if one agreed that the transubstantiationist interpretation was metaphysically exhaustive and impeccable—which is not necessarily the case—one would not be able to justify it logically by referring to the word-for-word formulation of Christ; if it can be justified some other way, fine, but one should not claim this results from the words “this is”.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 31 August 1972

You ask me why I wrote in my latest book that modern man “does this by means of his machines and serums”—why I speak specifically of serums and not chemical products in general. I wrote “serums” to be more concrete or imaginative, but in fact it is serums that are responsible for the overpopulation of the earth, and the rest of chemical production is more or less the consequence of this calamity. People seek to increase food production tenfold or a hundredfold— thanks to chemical products—and they do this precisely in order to forestall the dangers resulting from overpopulation. I could have spoken of mechanical constructions and chemical products or of technology and science, but I preferred to stay with two concrete images: machines and serums.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 22 June 1964.

The heliocentric system is not exclusively modern; I will not be telling you anything new in recalling here that Aristarchus of Samos and Hipparchus—and later al-Battani—taught it; nonetheless one understands why the ancients finally preferred the geocentric system: this system corresponds to immediate experience, hence to sacred symbolisms, whereas the opposite system is beyond most men's capacity for assimilation and entails serious dangers—it “troubles the repose of the Gods”, as the opponents of Aristarchus said—which does not mean it is astronomically incorrect. In any case, pushing scientific curiosity too far—to the detriment of contemplation and the inward knowledge of appearances—is imprudence and Luciferianism, and it is partly for this reason that the ancients instinctively retained the geocentric doctrine.

It goes without saying that the knowledge of realities that are normally unknown and contrary to current experience is a matter of indifference from the point of view of pure intellectuality and esoterism; if I bring it up here, it is simply because the context more or less requires it.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 13 April 1974.

Existentialism and psychoanalysis, without forgetting socialism, are mainly what killed basic intelligence in the West. When someone affirms that two plus two equals four, his pulse is taken, and he is asked what social milieu he comes from. Logic is replaced by relativistic psychology, which is in fact false at its root, and then by a so-called sociology. People claim there is no truth, and they assert this as true; they say that man can know nothing, but this is something they think they know; they claim that “life” takes precedence over thought, and yet this is something they think! People are so stupid they do not notice these contradictions.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 9 December 1985

Three factors alone are of concern to us: Truth, Way, and Virtue. God will hold us accountable for these three points; He will not hold us accountable for the modern world or for understanding His motives in having allowed a given evil.

Metaphysical Truth, with all the discernments deriving from it and required by our encounters with phenomena; next the Way, which is prayer in general and invocation in particular; and finally Virtue, which means the absence of all the defects that demean and mar the soul: this is all. Nothing and no one in the modern world prevents you from understanding and accepting metaphysical Truth or from distinguishing what is real from what is false or right from wrong; nothing and no one prevents you from invoking God every day; and nothing and no one prevents you from being virtuous.

There is no question of living in our times as men lived in the Middle Ages. In the first place this is impossible, and besides there is no reason for doing so. The Truth—or God—could never ask something unreasonable or impossible of us. If someone said to me that Truth, Way, and Virtue cannot be followed in the modern world, I would respond that there is no reason they cannot and indeed that there are thousands and even millions of men who do so. Spirituality, at whatever degree, makes no distinction between ancient man and modern man, for it is not concerned with “such and such men” but with “men as such”—in other words with the unchanging factors that define man or human nature. In this respect, which is the only one that matters, there is no difference between the men who lived during the period of the Council of Nicaea and those alive during the pseudo-Council of Vatican II. Likewise, two plus two have always equaled four, in the age of the Apostles as in our own. This is all that matters.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 31 July 1975

I read in an unpublished letter of Coomaraswamy's that "Jili had a vision of Plato filling all space with light" and that Meister Eckhart called Plato "the great priest". This may not be to the liking of S., who persists in his perfectly absurd anti-Platonism in his new article; it is a veritable perversion of intelligence. I do not recall where I read that some Sufis, perhaps including Rumi, called Plato "Sayyidna Aflatun" and that his tomb—near Konya if I am not mistaken—is venerated by certain *fuqarā'*. Coomaraswamy also notes, "Plato approved of the fixed types of the Egyptian Gods, but rejected the (Greek) painters and sculptors who produced likenesses or worked according to their own imagining." This is most significant.

In my youth I read somewhere that the Greeks called Plato "the divine" and even attributed a virginal birth to him; this second fact may have only a symbolic meaning. Be that as it may, if I were asked to choose between the "purely human" or "purely natural" wisdom of Plato and the "supernatural" wisdom of the anti-Platonist theologians—I have in mind those who revile Plato and Plotinus while claiming for their theology a right to holy absurdity—I would choose Platonism without hesitation, the logic of which does not trouble me in the least; for metaphysics is not true because it is logical but is logical because it is true. It is unnecessary to add that the Gospels are not intrinsically responsible for the abuses to which I have just referred; the "wisdom of the world" or "wisdom according to the flesh" is rationalism tending toward worldliness, not intellectuality tending toward the Absolute; Christian *gnosis* proves it. The attenuating circumstance for theologians is that they are *bhaktas*—I am speaking of doctrine—as well as exoterists.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of February 1971

The "doctrine of Awakening" presented briefly at the beginning of your book is correct in principle; this is obvious. But it becomes totally false and therefore spiritually inoperative—to say the least—once it becomes "agnostic", "iconoclastic", and "anti-religious", for in this case any religious dogmatism is more real or less false than it.

It is the religions that provide an adequate basis for the "doctrine of Awakening", and they do this in their esoterisms. As messages of salvation, they are of course situated within the dream world, but this does not mean that they are just anything, for distinctions must be made even here: within the dream these messages realize in a symbolical and horizontal way what "Awakening" is totally and vertically, and thus they represent an indispensable point of departure for "Awakening". It is impossible to escape the dream without the Will of Him who dreams—*Brahma saguna*—and without the Grace of Him who, within the dream, reflects Him who dreams. This reflection is the *Avatāra*, and it is only through the *Avatāra*—and therefore through God—that we can escape the dream; otherwise our "doctrine of Awakening" is nothing more than inoperative philosophy and spiritual suicide.

"Without me ye can do nothing", and also "He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad". The *Avatāra*—whether Christ or Muhammad or the Buddha—is *Shūnyamūrti*, "Manifestation of the Void", hence of "Awakening"; following the Buddha, for example, does not mean imitating some model as it appears in books; it means entering the Buddhist *Sangha* in one of its traditional forms—hence the "Triple Refuge"—and integration into the *Theravāda* or, on the Mahayanic side, into *Jōdo-Shinshū* or Zen, with all the liturgical consequences this implies. An "Awakening" without the *Avatāra*, hence without religion, will turn into Satanism; the dream itself will play the "Awakening", and this leads nowhere.

Furthermore, I absolutely do not see what harm there could be in salvation simply because it is still part of the dream—but it is the summit of the dream!—for this dream, all things considered, is not an

unintelligible chaos; if it were, there would be no qualitative differentiations, and the notion of “Awakening” itself would not exist. Before one can leave the dream, one must prostrate oneself before the Lord of the dream, who is God, and before His central reflection and spokesman in the dream: the Revealer, the *Avatāra*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 19 October 1980

Someone once told me that when he entered a mosque he felt constricted by the religious form; this is nonsense, of course, for if this were the case one could never take pleasure in any beautiful color but would appreciate only pure light; one would not see that a pure color also transmits light, though in a particular mode. When I enter a sanctuary, whatever the religion to which it belongs, I perceive with gratitude the particular *barakah*, and then in and through it the primordial *barakah*. And this takes nothing away from the fact that the sanctuary proper to the *Religio perennis* is God’s free Nature.

There are people who adopt the dogmatic narrowness of a religion—its theological eccentricity and bias of soul—because of its symbolism and beauty; on the other hand there are people who reject the symbolism and beauty of a religion because of its narrowness. And yet in every religion there are both beauties and forms of narrowness, even in religions that are in a way prolongations of the Primordial Religion.

The *Religio perennis* is the body; the *Religio formalis* is the garment; each has its meaning, and each can be combined with the other in sundry ways.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon of 18 January 1982

The blanket of snow presently covering our region reminds me of the spiritual significance of snow as a crystalline element: it is illustrative of heavenly blessing, heavenly descent—falling snow has indeed something paradisiacal about it—and a purifying heavenly Presence, far removed from the throes of passion; this is how I experience the Call to Prayer in Islamic countries, as it floats down from Heaven and extinguishes as it were all earthly noise.

Speaking of the winter miracle of Nature, I would also like to say something about the other forms water takes. First about rain, which the Koran compares to life-bestowing Grace: it symbolizes vertical enlightenment coming down directly from Heaven; this is distinct from Tradition, which conveys the Sacred in a horizontal and indirect way and is symbolized by the river. The river in turn comes from the spring—that is, the historical, once-occurring Revelation—whereas rain has no determinable earthly origin; “the wind bloweth where it listeth”; in this way rain signifies the timeless or ever-actual Grace of the Spirit. This Grace “falls from Heaven”, and this Heaven is “within you”.

The lake conveys a message similar to that of the snow, which blankets all in its peace: it is heavenly Presence, the Presence of the Sacred, far above all that is petty, and it is *Sakīnah*, even closer to life and earth than the blanket of snow and yet altogether holy in its contemplative repose and stillness. Water lily and swan are akin to the lake, as are rushes and weeping willows and the reflection of the moon, or by day the golden path of the sun.

And then there is the sea, which bears witness to the Infinite itself; it is divine primordial Power, and yet also Peace in its immeasurable motionlessness; it is not without meaning that all rivers flow into the ocean.

From a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 5 October 1977

Difficulties resulting from contacts between whites and Indians are easy to understand. In the first place the white man does not have a sense of the sacred to the extent he is a modern man, and almost all whites are modern men; if he asks an Indian questions he usually does so out of curiosity, without realizing that the Indian has no motive for responding to an interrogation he considers indiscreet and pointless.

To say that modern man does not have a sense of the sacred amounts to recognizing that he is full of false ideas; intellectually and morally he is unaware of the axioms of the traditional spirit—in other words of spirituality as such; he does not know about metaphysics, cosmology, mysticism. Metaphysically modern man is unaware that everything is a manifestation of the Self, which is at once transcendent and immanent; he knows nothing of the doctrine of *Ātmā* and *Māyā* even if he has read some Hindu books, for in this case he thinks it is merely a question of concepts having a historical, psychological, or phenomenological interest—in short, things that can be put aside. Cosmologically he does not realize that the world is made of a hierarchical series of regions—beginning with the Self and extending to matter—and that the evolutionist error is simply a “horizontal” substitute for “vertical” emanation, which begins unfolding with the archetypes and passes through the animic or subtle world. This being the case, modern man also knows nothing of the sacred and its laws or of the psychology that is derived from it and bears witness to it.

Question: how can one study the metaphysics, cosmology, and spirituality of a people without having any idea what it means? This is the whole problem. And this is why people go around in circles indefinitely while developing by way of compensation finely drawn or charitable considerations that are beside the point. I repeat: the white man does not offer the Indian a sufficient, satisfying, or acceptable motivation for answering the questions he asks, nor in the eyes of the Indian does he exhibit a state of spiritual readiness meriting the answers he seeks. From the point of view of any traditional discipline, one does not have the right to speak of sacred things without a sufficient reason or outside the relationship between a master and his disciple; besides, there are things that lose their “power” if discussed without a plausible motive.

But there is more: beyond the fact that the Indian has no motive for answering questions whose justification he does not perceive, he cannot see the value of the white man’s need for logical explanations; and if in spite of this the Indian answers, he is unable to do so by means of the abstract categories of classic, European dialectic. He therefore responds in a symbolic language that the white man in turn cannot comprehend, for the modern mind does not understand symbolism, its principles, and its methods. If the Indian has gone to a university, there is a very good chance he will have accepted uncritically the errors and mental habits of white people and that the abstract and differentiated language he avails himself of will therefore be of no use to him when explaining the Indian mysteries. In a similar way there are Orientals who think with two separate brains, a traditional one and a modern one, so that their thinking is either impeccable or absurd depending on the brain they are using.

One might object that academics who study the Indians are no longer so ignorant because of the work of Eliade and others; I reply that they remain ignorant and incompetent enough to meet the description I gave above, if only because they draw no serious conclusions from whatever real knowledge they may possess.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated January 1971

Poetry is the “language of the gods”, and *noblesse oblige*; what I mean by this is that the poet has certain responsibilities. In poetry the musicality of things or their cosmic essentiality erupts onto the plane of language; and this process requires the grandeur, hence the authenticity, of both image and

sentiment. The poet spontaneously intuites the underlying musicality of phenomena; under the pressure of an image or emotion—the emotion, moreover, being naturally combined with concordant images—he expresses an archetypal beauty; without this pressure there is no poetry, which means that true poetry always has an aspect of inward necessity, whence its irreplaceable perfume.

I am rather hostile to poetry because hardly anyone knows how to write it—spiritual motives notwithstanding—and also because most true poets are the dupes of their talent and get lost in prolixity instead of letting the muse take over, for the muse is sometimes very parsimonious, which is saying something! This implies that there is an inward pressure that tolerates no vagueness or chitchat, and this pressure must be the result of a certain order of grandeur, whence the “musical crystallinity” of poetry, the convincing power of its inward necessity. There is no beauty without grandeur; these two qualities must be in the soul of the poet as well as in the form that he knows how to impart to language. Gem of perfection and vibration of infinitude.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 27-28 July 1984.

Guénon was right to specify that the *Vedānta* is the most direct and in a certain respect the most assimilable expression of pure metaphysics; no non-Hindu traditional affiliation could oblige us to ignore this or pretend to ignore it. Within the Semitic monotheistic religions there is an esoterism “in fact” and another “by right”; now it is the second that is equivalent to Vedantic wisdom; *de facto* esoterism results from what has been said or written—with the veilings and detours at times required by a given theological framework and above all by a given religious *upāya*. Doubtless it was in thinking of *de jure* esoterism that certain Cabalists were led to say that if wisdom were lost the sages could reconstitute it.

The monotheistic Scriptures each manifest an *upāya*, a religious perspective that is particular and characteristic by definition, and hermeneutics in general is affected accordingly; this is not the case for the fundamental formulations or symbols of the religions, which in themselves are not limitative in any way. For example, the *Shahādah*—“the most precious thing I have brought to the world”, according to the Prophet—expresses total metaphysical truth in a most direct and limpid manner; in Hindu terms I would say it is at once an *Upanishad* and a *Mantra*; and the second *Shahādah* is the complement of the first, which means that the mystery of immanence is joined to the mystery of transcendence. In Christianity the Patristic formula of saving reciprocity is a priceless jewel: “God became man that man might become God”; it is a revelation in the full sense, at the same level as the Scriptures; this may seem surprising, but it is a “paracletic” possibility, examples of which can be found—very rarely, it is true—in all traditional worlds. The sentence *anā'l-Haqq* of al-Hallaj is a case of this kind; it is the Sufic equivalent as it were of the Vedic *aham Brahmāsmi*; al-Hallaj himself affirmed the possibility of post-Koranic sayings situated at the level of the Koran, something for which other Sufis did not pardon him, at least not in his time.

But there are not only formulas; there are also theophanies. Christ, understood as universal symbol and regarded from the point of view of esoteric application, represents first of all the *Logos* in itself and then the immanent Intellect—*aliquid est in anima quod est increatum et increabile*—which at once illuminates and liberates; the Holy Virgin personifies the soul in a state of sanctifying grace or this grace itself. There is no theophany that is not prefigured in the very constitution of the human being, for man is “made in the image of God”; now esoterism aims at actualizing the divine content that God places in this mirror of Himself called man. Meister Eckhart spoke of immanent sacraments; analogous natural or “congenial” things may serve as sacramental supports, he said, for the same reason as sacraments in the proper sense of the word.

Thus one must distinguish between an esoterism that is more or less founded on a given theology and

bound up with the speculations provided *de facto* by the traditional sources—and it goes without saying that these doctrines or insights may be of the greatest interest—and another esoterism resulting from the truly fundamental elements of the religion and for this reason from the simple nature of things; the two dimensions may of course be combined, and in fact they often are; but it is a question of emphasis, and it is obviously to the second dimension that our perspective pertains *a priori*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 1 May 1940.

Regarding primordial man, I do not think he either laughed or wept, for his psychism was neither as developed nor therefore as exteriorized as that of fallen man; primordial man was much closer to the state of *prajnā*, or rather *samādhi*, which means that everything in him was reabsorbed into a certain state of beatific indifferentiation; laughter is only a kind of fallen and vulgar fragment of this beatitude, intensified as a result of outwardness; the physical manifestation of laughter stems from the same source.

What I mean is that there is no primordial laughter, at least not in the sense in which you seem to understand it. It goes without saying of course that to the extent a thing is positive it has a primordial prototype, but this prototype can be markedly different from what is derived from it. Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani says that the Name of *Allāh* dispels all sadness from the heart of man, but he does not say that this Name makes one laugh. I willingly gave up my sadness when God removed it from me. But let no one speak to me of gaiety!

I believe I mentioned to you in my last letter that I have always noticed that vulgar people love above all what makes them laugh, and they flee what is serious; outside their work they seek lighthearted things, abhorring all that is gravity and dignity and all that evokes pain or death. I am surprised I am writing this to you, for it seems to me so obvious. In your article you mentioned several saints who spent the better part of their life laughing and jesting. This is plausible only if their attitude was paradoxical and intentional, as with the *malāmatīyah*; but we are dealing then with an example of asceticism, and this contradicts your interpretation.

I would never think of criticizing spontaneous and unassuming gaiety, provided it is not incompatible with dignity; such gaiety is a question of temperament and thus in itself something neutral. But once gaiety is established as a matter of principle, I do condemn it because it then ceases to be unassuming; it loses its spontaneity and becomes pretentious; it opens the door to stupidity while including a kind of self-sufficiency, which is paralyzing with regard to spirituality even when it is more or less unconscious. Far be it from me to criticize your gaiety as long as it does not harm your path.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 22 February 1976

I am completely against ecumenism as it is envisaged today—with its ineffective “dialogues” and gratuitous and sentimental gestures amounting to nothing. Certainly an understanding between religions is possible and even necessary, though not on the dogmatic plane, but solely on the basis of common ideas and common interests. The common ideas are a transcendent, perfect, all-powerful, merciful Absolute, then a hereafter that is either good or bad depending on our merits or demerits; all the religions, including Buddhism—Buddhist “atheism” is simply a misunderstanding—are in agreement on these points. The common interests are a defense against materialism, atheism, perversion, subversion, and modernism in all its guises. I believe Pius XII once said that the wars between Christians and Muslims were but domestic quarrels compared to the present opposition between the world of the religions and that of militant materialism-atheism; he also said it was a consolation to know that there are millions of men who prostrate themselves five times a day before

God.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 15 March 1961.

The errors of the Mahesh Yogi movement are patently obvious. In reality the goal of meditation is not to have access to “limitless energy, heightened efficiency of thought and action, and release from tensions and anxiety [leading] to peace of mind and happiness”! None of these advantages has any spiritual value, for it is not happiness that matters: it is the motive and nature of happiness. The Sadhu says nothing of this, the sole important question, and this is what condemns him.

But there are also extrinsic criteria: the complete lack of intelligence and *barakah*, the propagandistic triviality, the modernist and pseudo-yogic style, the quasi-religious pretension. For instance, the Sadhu preaches in the West; how can he believe that Christ did not bring men everything they need? After all he cannot replace Christianity and the other religions, and yet this is what he pretends to do in declaring that he brings “the *summum bonum* of all that Christ and Krishna, Buddha and Muhammad taught”.

Heresies always arise from a terrible lack of any sense of proportion. Add to this the passional and sentimental element and then propaganda, and we have the irreversible infernal circle. I suppose the Sadhu in question is not a very intelligent man but is endowed with some psychic power; he may also be ambitious. None of this is necessarily malicious *a priori*, but it becomes so, and in this sense the Sadhu himself is a victim. False masters are dangerous because they are a mixture of good and evil, and they seduce with the good. I am inclined to believe the Sadhu is largely unconscious of the role the modern situation is making him play.

But this question of knowing what the Sadhu is has no importance, and it is perfectly fruitless to discuss it. This is an appalling case of deviation from a real *barakah*, which stems from an incapacity 1. to discern the nature of the modern world and 2. to resist the temptations resulting from this nature. A typical error is to believe that the rapid expansion of a modern sect—thanks to mechanical means—is comparable to the miraculous expansion of the religions. Everything is “confusion”, “belittling”, and “falsification”.

It must be said that India is a very dangerous terrain for most Westerners; they become imbued there with irremediable prejudices and pretensions. It goes without saying that I prefer the most narrow-minded of Catholics—if he is pious—to these pseudo-Hinduists, arrogant and permanently damaged as they are. They scorn the religious point of view, which they do not understand in the least and which alone could save them. One sometimes hates what one needs the most.

And what can one say about the infinite naiveté of believing that a method of meditation suffices 1. to change man and 2. to change humanity, hence politics as well? What happens in all this to the *Kali Yuga*, and what about the *japa* advocated by the Scriptures? If this “Regeneration Movement” came from Heaven, its first concern would be to defend the religions, to show their validity and unanimity, as Ramakrishna did; it would be to show their absolute necessity, to indict the modern outlook, to explain that this outlook is the culmination of the *Kali Yuga*, and perhaps to teach *japa*, with all the mandatory precautions.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 28 January 1956.

In principle the universal authority of the metaphysical and initiatic traditions of Asia, which reflect the nature of things more or less directly, takes precedence—when such an alternative exists—over the generally more “theological” authority of the monotheistic religions; I say “when such an alternative exists” because there are obviously cases where there is no such alternative, in esoterism as in essential

symbolism; no one can deny, however, that in Semitic doctrines the formulations and rules are usually determined by considerations of dogmatic, moral, and social opportuneness. But this cannot apply to pure Islam, that is, to the authority of its essential doctrine and fundamental symbolism; the *Shahādah* cannot but mean that “the world is false and *Brahma* is true” and “Thou are That” (*tat tvam asi*) or “I am *Brahma*” (*aham Brahmāsmi*); it is a pure expression of the Supreme Identity and of the unreality of the world; in the same way the other “pillars of Islam” (*arqān al-Dīn*), as well as such fundamental rules as dietary and artistic prohibitions, obviously constitute supports of intellection and realization, which universal metaphysics—or the “Unanimous Tradition”—can illuminate but not abolish.

When universal wisdom states that the Invocation contains and replaces all other rites, this is of decisive authority against those who would make the *sharīʿah* or *sunnah* into a kind of exclusive *karma-yoga*, and it even allows us to draw conclusions by analogy (*qiyās, ijtihād*) that most Shariites would find illicit; or again, if a given Muslim master required that we introduce every *dhikr* with an ablution and two *rakʿāt*, the universal and “antiformalist” authority of *japa-yoga* would take precedence over the authority of this master, at least in our case. On the other hand, if a Hindu or Buddhist master advised practicing *japa* before an image or issued an order for such a practice, it goes without saying that it is the authority of Islamic symbolism that would take precedence for us quite apart from any question of universality, for forms are forms, and some of them are essential and thus rejoin the universality of the spirit.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 7 July 1969.

What always surprises me with people discussing spirituality is that they are not aware of the essential or else lose sight of it, and in the absence of the one center they get lost in the many-sided periphery. One would like to interrupt them every time with the question, “What is the issue?” and then remind them that what matters first of all is discernment between the world and God, the transitory and the Permanent, the relative and the Absolute, the illusory and the Real, and then union—by means of a quasi-permanent orison—with what is known to be Absolute, hence Real. All the rest is but a question of means or outward covering.

What is essential in this context is the extrinsic as well as intrinsic virtues, such as patience, trust, gratitude, generosity—in short, humility and charity; I mean real humility and charity, not their childish counterfeits. For truth remains sterile in us without the beauties of the soul, and it becomes impossible for us not only to pray from time to time but to pray all the time, and with fruits. What counts in prayer is the fact of praying and that one prays with sincerity, and what makes life finally worth living—what allows one to live with trust and without despair—is the quasi-permanence of a sincere orison. There is also what one might call the sacramental quintessence of prayer: the divine Names, bearers in themselves of a certain saving Presence; the names of Jesus and Mary have this function within Christianity, and the same applies to the Hebrew Names of God, those one is allowed to pronounce; in the final analysis any traditional and liturgical Name of God constitutes a sufficient orison. This of course does not mean that one cannot speak to God as to a man when one feels the need or that canonical prayers—the scriptural ones—do not have a role to play.

In a certain sense the entire message of Christ is in these words: “The kingdom of Heaven is within you.” To pray is to remain “within”, in “holy inwardness”, something presupposing “holy silence”. Quintessentially speaking, to live from prayer is to remain blessedly enclosed in the Name of God.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 11 September 1945.

I deplore the fact that a certain number of those who claim to subscribe to an esoteric science believe

that human virtues can be neglected or even scorned when in fact they form a part of initiatic qualification and of the way itself, as Sufi treatises tirelessly reiterate; my point of view may strike some people as strange, but it is no more moralistic than that of the *Yoga Shāstras*, for example, which also set a high value on virtue. If it is true that every perfection has primarily a symbolic meaning, this hardly means that perfection itself is superfluous, quite the contrary: the symbol is the necessary support for the reality symbolized, and it is above all a modality of this reality. Every virtue is an eye that sees God.

When I receive a jumble of a letter, for example, full of petty, sterile, impotent, and futile concerns, written hastily and with a worried tone, I do not see in it the reflection of a soul that is a receptacle of the Real Presence; the “structure”, “style”, or “rhythm” of the soul must correspond to the object of its aspirations, and this object is the divine Reality, free from all infirmity. The Divine is Beauty, Grandeur, Solitude; thus the soul must realize these qualities not by imaginative improvisation, which would be fatal, but in conformity with divine truths; thus “greatness” of soul must not be sought by means of a hollow and sentimental attitude, as the Vivekanandists do, but by hierarchizing the psychic or mental contents and suppressing what opposes the “one thing needful”. Abu al-Mawahib al-Shadhili says: “Purify thyself of thy vulgar and contemptible traits and adopt His qualities, worthy of praise and full of glory.”

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated February 1968.

In *Tasawwuf* one must repeatedly begin a new life in order to maintain grace and not be lost. Man is weak, but God is Strength, and with Him everything is possible, even things that seem impossible. You have often spoken to me of your weakness; if you do not feel you are able to love God, you must at least fear Him. God is merciful, but He is also awesome, and it is impossible to understand His Mercy if one does not understand His Wrath. One must never think oneself too intelligent; our intelligence is nothing in relation to the Absolute. If God has given us the gift of intelligence, it must be combined with a childlike simplicity and purity; God abhors pretension and self-assurance. Thus whatever opinion we may have of ourselves, only one thing is absolutely certain: *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh*. It is also certain—in keeping with this very same supreme certainty—that we must die and appear before God. All the rest is of no importance. Begin a new life this very day; and if you do not want to do it for yourself—although in reality you have no choice—do it for those around you, for you owe them happiness. The only way to be happy is to make those who depend on us happy, to make them happy in God and by Him.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 28 January 1956

What distinguishes us above all from Muslim-born or converted individuals—“psychologically”, one could say—is that our mind is *a priori* centered on universal metaphysics (*Advaita Vedānta*, *Shahādah*, *Risālat al-Ahadiyah*) and the universal path of the divine Name (*japa-yoga*, *nembutsu*, *dhikr*, prayer of the heart); it is because of these two factors that we are in a traditional form, which in fact—though not in principle—is Islam. The universal orthodoxy emanating from these two sources of authority determines our interpretation of the *sharī'ah* and Islam in general, somewhat as the moon influences the oceans without being located on the terrestrial globe; in the absence of the moon, the motions of the sea would be inconceivable and “illegitimate”, so to speak. What universal metaphysics says has decisive authority for us, as does the “onomatological” science connected to it, a fact that once earned us the reproach of “de-Islamicizing Islam”; it is not so much a matter of the conscious application of principles formulated outside of Islamism by metaphysical traditions from Asia as of inspirations in conformity with these principles; in a situation such as ours, the spiritual authority—or the soul that is

its vehicle—becomes like a point of intersection for all the rays of truth, whatever their origin.

One must always take account of the following: in principle the universal authority of the metaphysical and initiatic traditions of Asia, whose point of view reflects the nature of things more or less directly, takes precedence—when such an alternative exists—over the generally more “theological” authority of the monotheistic religions; I say “when such an alternative exists”, for obviously it sometimes happens, in esoterism as in essential symbolism, that there is no such alternative; no one can deny, however, that in Semitic doctrines the formulations and rules are usually determined by considerations of dogmatic, moral, and social opportuneness. But this cannot apply to pure Islam, that is, to the authority of its essential doctrine and fundamental symbolism; the *Shahādah* cannot but mean that “the world is false and *Brahma* is true” and that “you are That” (*tat tvam asi*), or that “I am *Brahma*” (*aham Brahmāsmi*); it is a pure expression of both the unreality of the world and the supreme identity; in the same way, the other “pillars of Islam” (*arqān al-Dīn*), as well as such fundamental rules as dietary and artistic prohibitions, obviously constitute supports of intellection and realization, which universal metaphysics—or the “Unanimous Tradition”—can illuminate but not abolish, as far as we are concerned. When universal wisdom states that the invocation contains and replaces all other rites, this is of decisive authority against those who would make the *sharī'ah* or *sunnah* into a kind of exclusive *karma-yoga*, and it even allows us to draw conclusions by analogy (*qiyās, ijtihād*) that most Shariites would find illicit; or again, should a given Muslim master require us to introduce every *dhikr* with an ablution and two *raka'āt*, the universal—and “antiformalist”—authority of *japa-yoga* would take precedence over the authority of this master, at least in our case. On the other hand, should a Hindu or Buddhist master give the order to practice *japa* before an image, it goes without saying that it is the authority of Islamic symbolism that would take precedence for us quite apart from any question of universality, because forms are forms, and some of them are essential and thereby rejoin the universality of the spirit.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 19 October 1974

I am glad to learn you have finally desisted from fasting, for the body needs all its strength when it is ailing, that is, one needs strength to eliminate an ailment that risks establishing itself if it can profit from a weakening and lack of resistance. In short, one has the right to be prudent, especially at our age; there are *fuqarā'* who are not so, although our perspective does not require any quasi-heroic zeal on the plane of the *sharī'ah*; the emphasis being on the *Dhikr*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 7 August 1979

You ask whether I meant to say in one of my books that “intelligence cannot discern truth without reference either to esoterism, on the one hand, or the Revelation and its commentators, on the other, beginning with the Prophet Muhammad”. What I meant to say is the following: in principle pure intelligence—the Intellect—can know all that is knowable; in principle it can know this on its own without the intervention of an outward teaching. But in fact it is much more likely that even the most gifted mind cannot draw all of metaphysics from itself; if Shankara had grown up in total ignorance, never having heard of the *Veda, Ātmā, Māyā*, can it be affirmed with certainty that he could have drawn these notions out of himself? Revelation, whether Vedic or otherwise, not only communicates key ideas to us, but also—and above all—awakens or actualizes the latent knowledge we bear within ourselves. You say: “But the Muslim philosophers, like their predecessors in Greece, talked about many things not mentioned by the Prophet and the early notables of Islam.” Of course, for the Prophet—or the Koran—gave no more than the impulsion; the Greek philosophers themselves also needed certain traditional stimuli. Every man has parents, and parents always have ideas; I am thinking now of Antiquity. Once the impulsion is given—Koranic and Hellenist for the Arabs—metaphysical and mystical authors can

have completely original ideas, whether from inspiration or simply reflection.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 28 January 1956.

Concerning the question of the “formal” and “informal” or the “letter” (which may kill) and the “spirit” (which vivifies), I would like to note that there is always, or nearly always, an intermediate region between exoterism and esoterism, a *barzakh*, which appears both as an esoterized exoterism and an exoterized esoterism; Christianity is nothing else, whence its paradoxical character, and with regard to Islam we find this *barzakh* in the ritualism of a Ghazzali and in popular Sufism, but also throughout the collective forms of *Tasawwuf*. Between exoterism and esoterism there always exists a ritualistic and moral *karma-yoga*; now this *yoga*, by the very fact of its individualistic nature—for action and merit necessarily belong to the individual—is opposed to the metaphysical perspective as well as to the way of the saving Name. The rationalizing individualism of Muslim piety is as non-metaphysical as the sentimental individualism of Christians. There is a marked tendency toward a transcendence of forms in any esoterism inasmuch as this viewpoint is directly affirmed—on the doctrinal plane, where every formulation becomes an *upāya*, an “unavoidable artifice”, as well as on the methodical plane, where concentration and its direct supports absorb most of the exterior rites; to deny this tendency is to go against the nature of things.

The whole emphasis must be placed on metaphysical truth and the divine Name; this is a “religion” that runs through all traditional forms just as the thread runs through the cloth. Starting from a source of doctrinal, hence intellectual, evidence, one must realize faith and find—in and by the Name—inner certitude, which is our very being.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 3 February 1955.

I must always repeat to the *fuqarā'* that if some expression of destiny upsets them they should submit to it in their personal prayers and even thank God for the trial, only then asking Him to free them from it. Likewise, when a person bothers us and we even come to criticize him, which is inevitable in some cases, we must reestablish equilibrium by praying for him, provided the person is not a *kāfir*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 15 March 1974.

The psychological cleansing of a man should be accomplished *a priori* and fundamentally by religion: it is the Truth that heals, and it is our sincerity and fervor that contribute to this healing. If we have realized the elementary equilibrium that religion, by definition, is capable of conferring upon us and if there remains within us nonetheless—within the framework of this elementary equilibrium—some defect or psychic asymmetry that needs correction, we may consider using secondary supports, of the artistic order for example, provided these supports are compatible with Islam in particular and spiritual dignity in general. But once again it should not be a question of commencing with such supports, for the beginning of a spiritual career should be based exclusively on spiritual and traditional elements; one must begin with the fear of God! On the level of esoterism I would say that one does not initiate an abnormal man and that a normal man has no need for psychological treatment; on the level of exoterism I would say that religion by its very nature possesses sufficient resources to stabilize the soul.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 30 November 1978.

I am sending you here an article in which I have attempted to offer a synthesis of what is essential and sufficient in Sufism. Indeed it sometimes happens that the *fuqarā'* draw their inspiration from all kinds of Sufi readings that are very uneven, believing they are going to find doctrinal and methodical directives that are authoritative; in reality what is authoritative for us is only what is essential and what therefore coincides with the *sophia perennis*, as I demonstrate in my article included here, precisely. The *fuqarā'* readily believe that Ibn Arabi above all is for us an absolute authority or the authority as such, but this is not the case, for whatever his merits or prestige, this author is most uneven, sometimes professing opinions that are questionable, to say the least; and this is to say nothing of the fact that the Sufis contradict one another and that there are in Sufism, as in all traditional spirituality, certain variations in perspective—*ikhtilāf al-'ulamā' rahmah*—or uneven abilities in discernment and perspicacity; not everyone is a *jnānin* in the full sense of this word. I therefore wrote this article in order to provide points of reference for what I shall term our *tarīqah's* perspective, which is “special” precisely in virtue of its character as a synthesis; each thing comes in its own time. *Allāhu karīm*.

Before writing this article, I wrote another on weaknesses found in “average Sufism”, which is too involved with Asharite theology; I have just written a third article as well, on the notion of “philosophy”. All of this is connected, but the article included here is by far the most important for the *fuqarā'*. If I mention the other two articles, it is because I intend to send you some copies when they are ready so that you can have a complete picture; for all this concerns our perspective, hence our doctrine.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 5 May 1945.

Concerning Ibn Arabi, I recall that someone once questioned whether Sufism admits traditional universality; Ibn Arabi supposedly would have denied this because he said that Islam is the pivot of the other traditions. Now every traditional form is superior to others in a certain respect, and this is in fact the sufficient reason for such a form; and it is always this respect that a person speaking in the name of his tradition has in mind; what matters in the recognition of other traditional forms is the fact—exoterically astonishing—of this recognition, not its mode or degree. In fact the Koran offers the prototype of this way of seeing: on the one hand it says that all the Prophets are equal, and on the other hand it says that some are superior to others, which means—according to the commentary by Ibn Arabi—that each Prophet is superior to the others owing to a particularity belonging to him alone, that is, in a certain respect.

Ibn Arabi belonged to a Muslim civilization and owed his spiritual realization to the Islamic *barakah* and the masters of Sufism, hence to the Islamic form; he was therefore obliged to take a position consistent with this aspect of things, the aspect according to which this form contains a superiority with respect to other forms; if this relative superiority did not exist, Hindus who became Muslims throughout the centuries would never have had any positive reason for doing so; the fact that Islam constitutes the last form of the *Sanātana Dharma* in this *mahāyuga* implies that it possesses a certain contingent superiority over the preceding forms; in the same way the fact that Hinduism is the most ancient traditional form still living implies that it possesses a certain superiority or “centrality” compared to later forms; there is quite obviously no contradiction here since the relationships to be considered are in each case different.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 17 January 1950.

All our happiness must come from the holy mystery of His Name.

The worldly or imperfect man goes through life as if on a long road; if he is a believer, he sees God above him in the far distance and also at the end of this road. The spiritual man, however, stands in

God, and life passes before him like a stream.

One must think of God when in plenitude that He may think of us when in emptiness.

Happiness is where holiness is. Holiness is like an opening toward Heaven; it is being recollected within the Unique. Every man is holy when he thinks of God if he is thinking of nothing else.

The brethren must be told that all should be done with concentration: ablution, ritual prayer, rosary, invocation, individual prayer, Koranic reading. In the regular practices in particular—ablution, ritual prayer, rosary—one must know what one is doing and what one is saying. For the invocation, the need for concentration goes without saying.

In the ablution, the hands refer to profane actions; the mouth to the impurities contracted knowingly; the nose to the impurities contracted unwillingly and unconsciously; the face to the shame of sin; the forearms to impure intention; the ears to deafness with regard to the divine Word; the head to pride; the feet to waywardness. Or in positive terms: the purified hands to spiritual actions; the mouth to active purity; the nose to passive and unconscious purity; the face to the state of grace; the forearms to purity of intention; the ears to receptivity to the divine Word or to spiritual or angelic inspirations; the head to humility before God, hence to awareness of our nothingness; the feet to our qualification for the path of contemplation.

This is a teaching I found in a text of the *Shaykh al-Akbar*, which I read years ago.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 5 May 1945.

In one of L.'s letters, I was surprised to find the following assertion: "As a Muslim, I had incurred no responsibility toward anyone, and I was thus, and still am, entirely free to do whatever seems in my best interest." The author of this sentence does not seem to know that there is no traditional form that allows its members to leave it; for example, it is impossible for a Hindu to become a Muslim without being expelled from his caste, which signifies civic death; and is it necessary to recall that no religion allows passage into another religion? Islamic Law reserves capital punishment for apostasy (*irtidād*); therefore, I do not see how one can think oneself independent with respect to Islam by virtue of one's quality "as a Muslim". As for esoterism—Islamic or otherwise—there can be exceptional cases where a change of traditional form cannot be excluded, which amounts to saying that esoterism alone can see in such a change something other than "apostasy"; nonetheless it is clear that in esoterism one depends upon one's Master and that nothing can be done without him. L. became a Muslim to be a *faqīr*; he did not become a *faqīr* to be a Muslim; it is therefore all the more illogical to lay a claim as a *faqīr* to one's "freedom" as a "Muslim". It should be added that for a change of traditional form to be legitimate the first condition is that the motive must be one of "technical" opportuneness, the change not being a conversion pure and simple, as is the case for L. and M.; in other words this change must really be considered a passage from one form to another and not a passage from error to truth.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 29 January 1975.

In the cases of T. and N. I did not pray just for a cure, because I foresaw all too clearly that the Will of God—for the good of these *fuqarā'*—might be otherwise.

There cannot be a definitive, hence unvarying, equilibrium between God and man; God alone is immutable. Now He sometimes disrupts an equilibrium to replace it with a new equilibrium, which makes the *faqīr* undergo a kind of death: the *faqīr* still knows that *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh*, but he no longer knows who he himself is. He must therefore find a new identity on the basis of the single certitude that

is left him, which is precisely that *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh*; in such nights nothing remains but the Truth and Faith and, conformably with these, Patience and Trust; they enable us to vanquish all the vertigos. One must realize a perfect equilibrium between the vertical and the horizontal; with most men, however, the horizontal takes precedence over the vertical, spiritual life becoming too human, too individual, too terrestrial; one must therefore start again more or less at zero and be born anew. All *Rahmah* lies in the supreme Name, and in *Rahmah*, which is inexhaustible, we cannot lose anything. Whoever dies for *Rahmah* is reborn in *Rahmah*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 29 May 1964.

I must call your attention to an important aspect of universality or unity: the divergence between religions is not only due to the incomprehension of men; it is also in the Revelations, hence in the divine Will, and this is why there is a difference between exoterism and esoterism; the diverse dogmas contradict one another, not only in the minds of theologians, but also—and *a priori*—in the sacred Scriptures; in giving these Scriptures, however, God at the same time gives the keys for understanding their underlying unity. If all men were metaphysicians and contemplatives, a single Revelation might be enough; but since this is not how things are, the Absolute must reveal itself in different ways, and the metaphysical viewpoints from which these Revelations are derived—according to different logical needs and different spiritual temperaments—cannot but contradict one another on the plane of forms, somewhat as geometrical figures contradict each other as long as one has not grasped their spatial and symbolic homogeneity.

God could not wish for all men to understand Unity since this understanding is contrary to the nature of man in the “dark age”. This is why I am against ecumenism, which is an impossibility and absurdity pure and simple. The great evil is not that men of different religions do not understand one other, but that too many men—due to the influence of the modern spirit—are no longer believers. If religious divergences are particularly painful in our times, this is only because the divisions between believers, in the face of an unbelief that has become more and more menacing, have become all the more acute and also all the more dangerous. It is therefore high time that: 1. men return to faith, whatever their religion may be, on condition that it is intrinsically orthodox and in spite of dogmatic ostracisms; 2. that those who are capable of understanding pure metaphysics, esoterism, and the inward unity of religions discover these truths and draw the necessary inward and outward conclusions. And this is why I write books.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 21 November 1975.

There is indeed only “one thing needful”, and it is impossible to avoid it within the framework of the human vocation, given on the one hand that our intelligence is made for the Truth and on the other hand that we have a soul to save.

To understand a religion in depth, one must understand religion as such: now the religious phenomenon is identified in its essence with the one and universal wisdom, hence with esoterism or the “primordial tradition”, or if one prefers with the *philosophia perennis*. In other words esoteric wisdom is based doctrinally and methodically on what is common to all religions or on what underlies each one of them. If I am repeating here something evident, it is to emphasize that one must never lose sight of this fact—for experience proves the temptation to do so is great—when engaged in the practice of an orthodox spirituality, that is, when one is surrounded by a framework of formalism or mythology.

There are three planes to consider in the human microcosm: namely, intelligence, will, and soul. The spiritual function of human intelligence—hence its essential function—is discernment between the

Real and the illusory, the Absolute and the contingent, the Infinite and the finite, the Permanent and the impermanent; this is the one and universal Doctrine, hence the quintessence of all theology and all metaphysics. Then there is the will: the spiritual function of the human will, which is free, is essentially the concentration—in principle continuous—of the mind on the Real, the Absolute, the Infinite, the Permanent, or on the avataric Manifestation of the Real, which in practice amounts to the same; this is the Method, and it is the quintessence of all possible ways, for “prayer” is everything, and according to Saint Paul one must “pray without ceasing”. Finally there is the soul, the character, sensibility, affectivity, the capacity to love: the spiritual function of the soul is essentially a quasi-existential conformation to the Real, namely virtue; this is Morality, not merely extrinsic and social, of course, but intrinsic and contemplative; without beauty of soul—I would even say without the sense of beauty—no spirituality is possible, displeasing as this may be for the ignorant and for pedants who imagine that with respect to metaphysical realization “technique” is all that matters, that is, a kind of coldly mechanical *yoga*. Discernment, concentration, virtue: it is these elements and nothing else that one must seek when engaged as a metaphysician in a traditional way; when practicing such a way, one must not be “converted” to a given theology or mythology, though one must love the symbols and their beauty in one’s own religious cosmos as in that of others.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 26 February 1963.

The immeasurable merit of Amida—or the merciful quality of the Absolute, in a more real or less unreal sense—can have the effect of instantaneously burning away the karmic layer of ignorance separating man from *Nirvâna*; it is not that *Nirvâna* is “given”, but that ignorance is “removed”.

Below this perspective, *Shinshû* declares the existence of a bhaktic Paradise located in the West, something that the simple faithful interpret literally.

In *Les Sectes bouddhiques japonaises* by Steinilber-Oberlin, one can read: “At the end of our earthly life, we cast off the last traces of this corrupted existence, and reborn in the Land of Purity and Happiness we obtain the Buddha’s Enlightenment.”

In the language of the *Tarîqah* we would say that the perfection of faith is the quintessence of the six themes of meditation and that it is this quintessence that creates the conditions for perfect receptivity with regard to the salvific and enlightening Grace contained in the divine Name, or more precisely in the Absolute this Name represents concretely. One could also say that what puts us definitively into contact with Grace is first pure Truth and second perfect Concentration; all of this coincides with “faith” as understood by Shinran.

Christian *gnosis* is directly analogous in a certain sense to *Shinshû* in that Redemption, hence the inexhaustible merit of Christ, is a manifestation—or the manifestation—of the merciful Power of the Infinite; Redemption does not “bestow” *gnosis*, but it removes what separates us from it if we know how to place ourselves into the requisite conditions. As in *Jôdo-Shinshû*, there is in Christianity a literal and bhaktic application and a metaphysical and jnânic application.

Shinshû is an ontological way, all things considered; what must be found—among a thousand possibilities—is the thread linking us to the Absolute; this thread appears to be infinitesimal, but it suffices because it is what it is.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 7 October 1960.

According to some of the Greek Fathers and Orthodox theologians, the “Incarnation” brought about a kind of universal blessing, an effusion of “Christic” grace even outside the visible Church. In order to

give this remarkable doctrine its full scope and complete universality, it is necessary to know that the “Incarnation” can touch non-Christians only on condition of being situated outside of history: the “Self” is “incarnated” in separativity or illusion; *Âtmâ* is “incarnated” in *Mâyâ*; it is the entry into *Mâyâ*—giving rise to *Îshvara*—that constitutes the “Incarnation” *in divinis*, the eternal Incarnation; it is this Incarnation that has saved beings—first as possibilities—from nothingness, if one may put it this way. On a more reduced scale—or at a lesser degree of reality—the Incarnation is *Buddhi*, that is, the “sacrificial” entry of *Purusha* into Existence; it is the existential *fiat lux*, the illumination of darkness or chaos. In a more particular meaning, which concerns man, *Buddhi* saves in its capacity as Vishnu or Shiva, that is, through *bhakti* or *jnâna*; *Buddhi* has both an existential function and an intellectual function, and it is the second that can be termed “Christic”. Christ manifests these prototypes of the “Incarnation” and “Redemption” historically and directly through his very person; but every other Revelation manifests them likewise, each in its fashion, depending on the aspects of the Real and possible perspectives.

Âtmâ, by entering *Mâyâ* as *Îshvara*, has “saved” possibilities from nothingness; *Îshvara* has saved potentialities from Non-Being and virtualities from non-manifestation; *Buddhi* saves beings—in an inverse and ascending manner—from negative manifestation, then manifestation as such; it does so objectively through the *Avatâra* and subjectively through the Intellect.

None of this in any way excludes the fact that the birth and death of Christ had the effect of bringing about a universal effusion of graces; but the same is true for each Revelation; in this case it is not a matter of decisive and salvific graces—which are already bestowed by the respective Revelation—but of vivifying graces; it is in this sense that the “Descent” (*tanzîl*) of the Koran can be said to mysteriously touch other spiritualities including the Christian or that the “Enlightenment” (*Bodhi*) of the Buddha illuminated Hindu spirituality. One can even say, paradoxically, that Christ vivified the esoterism of the Greco-Roman tradition even though it was perishing through the mere fact of his advent.

Some might object that Christ alone directly manifests the eternal “Incarnation” and that as a result the manner of manifesting it is indirect in the other Revelations; we would answer by saying that only the Buddha manifests the eternal *Bodhi* in a direct manner and that *Bodhi* appears therefore in an indirect manner in Christ, and so on and so forth. This is due to the fact that we speak of “Incarnation” because of Christ and of “Enlightenment” because of the Buddha; the possible designations of the prototype of Revelation and Deliverance are indefinite in number. There is in manifestation an unfolding of symbols, and each symbol refers to a real aspect of the divine Model or the universal models derived from it; but since it is a question here of the same principial and primordial reality, namely, the entry of the Absolute into relativity—whatever the degree considered—the modes or symbols are not mutually exclusive: the entry of the Koranic Revelation into the body of the Prophet can be termed an “incarnation” of the Word, just as the entry of the Holy Spirit—bearer of the Word—into the body of the Virgin is a “descent” of the divine Book; and likewise these two modes are within *Bodhi* as *Bodhi* is within them.

All of this is obvious to us, but I held to formulating it as I have just done. I intend to write on this subject. *In shâ’a ’Llâh*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 21 November 1975.

Christianity is a bhaktic esoterism become religion; hence it is exoteric by its literalist and dogmatist interpretations and not by its symbolism or means, which are initiatic in their essence. Baptism and Confirmation taken together constitute Christian initiation; according to Guénon the sacraments later lost their initiatic character, but this is impossible in principle and in fact: in principle, because God

never gives less than He promises—rather the opposite is true—and in fact, because it is technically impossible to bring about such a change, if only because of the dispersion of Christians starting from the first centuries. From the point of view of method, the central means is an ejaculatory orison containing the sacramental Name of Jesus or that of Mary, or both of them at once; the central *mantra* of Christianity—the support for concentration—is therefore *Jesu* or *Jesu Maria* in Latin or Greek. Whoever wishes to practice this method, which dates back to the origins of Christianity, must solemnly promise the Blessed Virgin to do so—in the form of a vow—in a sanctuary dedicated to her; he must also ask the Virgin's permission and implore her assistance, and this will have to be kept secret, at least *a priori* and under normal circumstances. And he will then have to renounce all the dispersing and degrading trivialities of the modern world; we must await death in a little spiritual garden and do so in the midst of our family life and worldly duties. God wants our soul and nothing else; if He demands something more from us, we shall know of this with certitude by giving Him our soul.

I write all this, Madame, out of duty so as not to overlook anything; therefore, I must tell you likewise that Islamic esoterism is also accessible in the West, but I have no reason *a priori* to go into further detail regarding it. That said, let us return to the essential. There are two moments in life, and these moments are everything: the present moment when we are free to choose what we want to be and the moment of death when we no longer have any choice and the decision belongs entirely to God. Now if the present moment is good, death will be good; if we are now with God—in this present that renews itself ceaselessly while remaining always the only actual moment—God will be with us at the moment of our death. The remembrance of God—ejaculatory orison—is a death in life; it will be a life in death.

Between the present moment when we remember God and the moment of death when God will remember us—and this reciprocity exists already in every prayer—there is the rest of life, the duration extending from the present moment until the last; but duration is but a succession of present moments, for we live always “now”; thus concretely and operatively speaking it is always the same blessed instant when we are free to remember God and to find our happiness in this remembrance.

P.S. Metaphysical truth and perpetual prayer, together with intrinsic virtue—virtue considered in terms of beauty—are the fundamental elements of the esoteric way and in the final analysis of all spirituality. And the divine Name contains in principle the totality of all sacramental means.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated c. 1960

The Holy Name of Jesus contains all Truth and Grace; if one adds to it the Name of Mary, then one is placing special emphasis on the aspect of Grace, although this aspect is also contained in the Name of Jesus. It is advantageous to pronounce the Names in a liturgical or sacred language.

Even if all of our past has been nothing but error and disappointment, we must bless it if now, in this very instant, we have the grace of remembering God. Whoever stands before God or withdraws into Him has never lost anything. “The Kingdom of God is within you.” And this Kingdom is now, not yesterday; it is here, not elsewhere: here in the sacred Name and in this blessed instant.

You tell me in your letter that your soul is often sad and discouraged; this is natural, but it is necessary above all not to allow bitterness to enter it, not even in a roundabout or indirect manner, for example by objectifying personal experiences. This would also be illogical since we know that others have had other experiences and that our experience is no more real than theirs.

Certainly your life is very agitated, but you must get into the habit of inserting in it the remembrance of God—the “act of love” as Sister Consolata would say—and this is possible in every circumstance.

The world is a battleground, and it is necessary that there be everywhere warriors of the Light, if I may

express myself thus. In the meantime you are where Providence has placed you, and this means that there must be even there—in the chaos in which you live—someone who thinks of God or in other words who manifests the “remembrance”. We must bear witness invisibly. In any case we have no choice; each must do as he is able.

Regarding confession, it must be considered in its strictly sacramental aspect. A person can always accuse himself for his infraction of rules, then for his lukewarmness, if he wishes, but it is not a question of “personal secrets”. The priest is the instrument of a sacramental grace and not necessarily a master; it is even very unlikely that he is a master, although he should be so and is so in principle.

Spiritual sincerity is a grace. One can always blame oneself for lacking in it, but this is in vain; God knows very well that a man is human. Therefore one must cling to God and have trust. The worst of errors is to close oneself to Mercy.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 21 May 1961.

It is important not to underestimate—to say the least—the “moral” and “aesthetic” aspects of spirituality; what I mean by the first term are the virtues in the broadest sense of the word and by the second the forms and proportions of things, hence the symbolism of means of expression, for this symbolism is connected with the activity of the *barakah*.

While I am thinking of it: in my opinion one must avoid saying that the “supreme Principle” or the “Self” is superior to “God” or that metaphysics or “tradition” is more than “religion”—although tradition can be more, it is not necessarily so—or again that “initiation” is superior to “mysticism”; in other words one must not say that “God” is something “less”, and this must not be said of “religion” or “mysticism” or the “saints” either. One must say—and this is more than a mere question of opportunity—that the “Self” is the “essence” or the “supreme reality” of God just as one must say, and as the disciples of Shaykh al-Alawi have assured me, that esoterism is the summit or quintessence of religion, and so on. In Arabic it would be completely ill sounding and even inconceivable to limit the Name *Allâh* in any fashion whatsoever or to separate *tasawwuf* from *dîn*; now Islam is a Semitic and monotheistic religion, like Christianity; what I do not accept for the one, I do not accept for the other. I know from experience that the Guénonian “believer” becomes intractable when he hears the words “God” and “religion”, but this is unacceptable, especially when it is a question of the term “God”; I protest categorically, in the name of my function, against such a pernicious abuse of language. There are mysteries “in God”; there are none “beyond”.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 19 July 1974.

The past is indeed a matter of complete indifference, all the more as it is materially impossible in certain cases to verify to what degree we were right or wrong. It is not because we were right in the past that we are pleasing to God; it is because right now we give ourselves to Him in prayer and forget the past, whether good or bad.

And what matters is that God welcome us into Beatitude, not that He introduce us into some particular Paradise rather than another. “Deliverance” (*Moksha*) or the “Paradise of the Essence” (*Jannat al-Dhât*) is for the great sages; moreover every soul that is saved is in a certain manner “delivered”. If we can hope to be saved—and we can by practicing prayer while abstaining from evil—the question of knowing where God will place us should be the least of our concerns.

Metaphysics is a boundless domain, and one must not wish to understand everything: first because not every man can understand everything and because one must be resigned to the possibility of having

limitations, and second because the basic metaphysical truths are sufficient and because in prayer we possess all we need.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 2 June 1974.

I see that S. persists in his anti-Platonism; were he right—and I wonder whether he is aware of this—all of Sufism and all the *Vedānta* would collapse along with Plato, given that the idea of relativity in principial Reality—in *divinis*, if one wishes—is essential to all metaphysics. Hence if the Platonists are mistaken, all the East is mistaken with them, including Buddhism, which also has the sense of relativity to the highest degree. S. believes that for the Platonists the idea of relativity in the Absolute—or the idea of a graduated Absolute—is true because it is logical, whereas in reality the relationship is the reverse: it is logical because it is true; no Platonist has ever said anything else. All things considered S. places before us the following dilemma: either to renounce Sufism, Vedantism, Buddhism and become Orthodox Christians, or else to reject Orthodoxy—or Christianity in general—as a heresy; for were he right in attributing this “sacred illogicality” to Christianity, we would have no other choice. What surprises me in all this is that he takes Christian theologians so earnestly when it should be easy to see what their human and intellectual limitations are by reading their books. Read the following in Gregory Palamas: “Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates, in a manner low and unworthy of God, considered those models (the archetypes) as principles having their own existence. Hence they are the ones who should be accused of polytheism: indeed they had the heedlessness to introduce on their own initiative other divine natures, principles of beings, between the Supra-essential and creatures. . . . Divine wisdom tends essentially toward the following goal: to know what is the will of God, what is good, perfect, and pleasing to God.” And there it is! The quoted text provides the key to the enigma: there is nothing relative in *divinis*—there is neither *Īshvara* nor *Purusha* nor *Prakriti*—because this would be “unworthy of God”! The sublime equals the absolute. And whosoever thinks otherwise is to be reviled.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated November 1932.

Allow me to mention some reflections on the analogy linking various orders with the symbolism of the elements; in comparing the ordinary state of the human spirit with a mound of earth, during a meditation in my dervish’s cell, I was led to consider Liberation as having to be brought about by a passage through water, air, and fire before being fully realized in ether; and it seemed to me that everything without exception that can be said of the sensible elements and their reciprocal relationships also applies to these states of mind leading to Union. Moreover the symbolism can be transposed onto the mental plane in the sense that sentiment would correspond to earth, imagination to water, memory to air, reason to fire, the Intellect to ether. Through another transposition, the human body on the one hand and gross manifestation on the other correspond to earth, the human soul and subtle manifestation to water, the Intellect to air, Being to fire, and supreme Non-Being to ether. From another point of view, earth is humanity; water is the Church—or Tradition in general—or sacrifice or purification; air is the Son: the Word, the Prophet, the Doctrine; fire is the Holy Spirit, or Jibril or Revelation; ether is the Father, the Unique. Likewise “the Eternal Gospel” is ether; the four other Gospels are the other elements, the Gospel of Saint John, which is the last, being that of fire; and it is to be noted that Saint John is the author of the Apocalypse, which as a revelation is connected once again with the symbolism of fire.

There is something curious about Christianity in that it seems to have taken no account of the words of the crucified Christ to Saint John, making of him his bodily and spiritual brother; it seems to me there is a clear indication in this of the institution of something surpassing outward papacy; and in Islam Ali strikes me as sharing some analogy with Saint John. The fact that neither Saint John nor Ali has a

permanent outward representative, whereas everyone accepts the papacy and the caliphate as something evident, results without doubt from the very nature of the principle of which these favorite disciples are the expressions. Just as water, represented above all by the seas, never leaves the earth, so the pope of the outward Church, who baptizes with water, never leaves humanity; fire on the contrary is not always on the earth, but dwells in the ether and comes out of it only periodically to manifest itself; likewise the pope of the inward Church, who baptizes with fire, is not always in the midst of humanity and manifests himself only in special circumstances. And again: the doctrinal infallibility of the pope, the descendant of Saint Peter, is outward and indirect, residing in the papal function itself; the infallibility of the descendant of Saint John, however, is inward and direct, residing in intellectual intuition. In the same way the papacy as a historical fact presents an outward continuity, which the function Christ bestowed upon Saint John does not require in order to be just as legitimate. Moreover the respective natures of both dignities manifest themselves clearly in the thunderstorm: rain falls without ceasing whereas lightning manifests itself periodically without any outward continuity. It could further be remarked that water cannot do without fire; if the igneous principle deserts it, it freezes and acquires thereby the outward properties of earth, namely, density and divisibility; and this applies also to the Church of Saint Peter, whose authority no longer rests on intellectual intuition, but simply on outward orthodoxy. And it is significant that it is Saint John who wrote these words: *In ipso vita erat, et vita erat lux hominum. Et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.*

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 6 January 1984.

If we start with the idea that esoterism is fundamentally discernment between the Absolute and the contingent, the Real and the unreal, we can say that Christ personifies this discernment and that our participation in Christ is our integration into transcendent Truth, just as conversely our metaphysical discernment draws us to some degree into the nature of Christ. As for Islam, if we start with the idea that the object or content of esoterism is the Absolute, we can say that *Allāh* is this Absolute or the Absolute as such. But what I want to highlight above all is this Christian mystery: Christ is not only “manifestation” but also “discernment” of the Absolute or the Real; this specification is esoterically crucial because discernment is something direct, whereas manifestation is indirect.

Regarding myself personally, I shall say this: if I had entered Islam on the purely exoteric plane, I would be cut off from the sacramental graces I received in my childhood, but since I am an esoterist these graces remain in a living form in me, and I have not ceased being what I am as the result of these graces. Proof of this is the role the Holy Virgin plays in my life.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 18 November 1984.

A true metaphysician cannot unreservedly identify himself with a religious *upāya* and take pleasure in it with a kind of nationalism, but obviously he must identify with what is essential—hence both universal and primordial—in the *upāya*, and this is “Islam” *a fortiori*. Needless to say, what is essential transcends the *upāya*.

I want to give two examples of religious limitation, although you already know what I shall talk about. For Christianity man is a “sinner”; this is the definition of man, and it entails the idea that the entire world is bad and that the only alternative is between the “flesh” and the “spirit”; it goes without saying that this perspective has a certain relative justification, but its disadvantage is that it presents itself as absolute. For Islam man is not totally corrupted by the fall—a total corruption would be contrary to the very definition of man—but he is totally a “servant” or “slave”, which metaphysically is in fact an aspect of his nature but which could not sum up human nature as such; to believe the contrary is to

deny the specifically human intelligence and dignity, and it is thus to deny what constitutes the very reason for the existence of *homo sapiens*. In the case of Islam as in that of Christianity, theology tends to push the respective dogmatic image to the point of absurdity, and most mystics identify *de facto* with these pious excesses, something a consistent metaphysician—hence one who is aware of the nature of things—would never do.

In Muslim thought the axiom “He hath no associate” gives rise to the most inappropriate conclusions in various domains, but in Christian thought it is hypostatic diversity—the Trinity—that functions as the absolute, and the absence of the idea of *Māyā* is particularly noticeable; now a true metaphysician could not possibly identify himself with such positions, and hence could not commit himself to what I call “religious nationalism”. With good reason Guénon defined the “religious point of view”—the word “religious” having for him the meaning of “exoteric”—as a “sentimental attachment to an idea”. And one should not forget all the secondary excesses—sometimes very troublesome—to which confessional sentimentalism gives rise.

Personally, I am very sensitive to the following argument: when you say you are a “Muslim” or a “Christian”, you exclude an immense part of humanity; you separate yourself from it and reproach it for not being what you are; you proclaim before the entire world that only you have the truth, unless you speak with tacit Guénonian understandings that no one can presuppose *a priori*. Nothing of the kind is to be found with the American Indians: “The Great Spirit has given you your way of praying, and He has given us our way of praying”; and that is all.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 31 July 1986.

That a superficial and lukewarm Christian might change religions is something conceivable; one might always prefer one credo to another if only for purely sentimental reasons. But that a monk from Mount Athos would want to look for another path after several years of practice is inconceivable, and he would be a proud man and a wretch to do so. Likewise for Islam: it is possible for an exoterist Muslim to end up preferring another credo to his own, but it is not possible—this is not admissible under any circumstance—for a member of a Sufi brotherhood to seek a path other than Sufism. If he does so, he is an irresponsible person and an individualist, and in the final analysis a proud man and a wretch, because one does not invoke *Allāh*—for many years—for nothing!

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 9 May 1982.

In the first place we cannot but love the *Shahādah*, which is an unsurpassable formulation of metaphysical Truth; in a way it summarizes all the Koran. Next we cannot but love the moral and mystical personality of the Prophet, hence the second *Shahādah*, which is its symbol. Finally we cannot but love the *Dhikr*, by means of which we assimilate the mystery of the second *Shahādah* as well as that of the first. And it is impossible for us not to love the fundamental Laws of Islam, starting with canonical prayer, which are transparent and not in any way limitative in themselves. There is lastly the “liturgical” element in the broadest sense, namely Muslim art: calligraphy, architecture, the art of dress, and the arts and crafts; all of this is specifically Islamic, and spiritually speaking this is hardly insignificant.

But there is also theology—which interpenetrates Sufism to a very large extent—and the psychological style of average piety; we are now confronted with elements that cannot be likeable from our perspective, sharing as they do a close solidarity with what is most limitative in the “religious viewpoint”; and above all there are dogmatic elements: being unacceptable from the viewpoint of truth as such—while no doubt possessing a certain spiritually “therapeutic” function, but this is a completely

different matter—they are thereby unacceptable for us, who are aware of the values these dogmas exclude.

What is the Gospel? “It is full of stupid things,” a Maghrebi *faqīr* told me: the Apostles supposedly hid the true Gospel in a hollow tree, and a drunkard found it and wrote in it, and then the faithful found it and adopted it as it was; and there it is! Christ purportedly came not to establish a Church—and had he established it, it would have lasted for barely six centuries—but only to remind the Jews of what Abrahamic Islam was and to announce the coming of the Prophet, neither more nor less. Thus not only is the Gospel worthless, but Christ himself is obsolete and has been replaced by something better; the sacraments are nothing, and Christianity is a false religion leading one to hell. The Shaykh Darqawi narrates the story of a “great Christian saint” who converted to Islam and who, after becoming a Muslim, had to start from zero, at the level of the last of the Muhammadans.

Can we, or must we, who are Westerners “love” all of that? What must I think *a priori* of a Westerner who claims to have a “strong affinity with Islam”? Does this affinity include an ignorance of what Christ, the Gospel, the sacraments, and the ecclesiastical institution are? What interests me cannot be this “affinity” but the “wherefore” of such an affinity, not to mention its psychological style.

When Muslim books mention Christ, they attribute mostly commonplace attitudes to him or platitudes that are incompatible with his nature; for instance, it is said that he traveled constantly and that imitating him consists in this; or that he drank from a bowl, which he threw away when he saw a dog drink without a bowl—as a matter of fact, this is a confusion with Diogenes—which is ridiculous considering that we are dealing with the person of Jesus. Granted, Sayyidna Isa could never appear at the center of Islam since there is a difference in doctrinal and methodical perspective; nonetheless I do not “like” this way of casting him aside—no more, conversely, than I can “like” the Christian conviction that there is no salvation outside of the person of Jesus, or that the *Vedas* are not sacred Scriptures, and so on and so forth.

I shall perhaps be told that “everyone” knows all of this; no doubt, but not everyone draws the required conclusions; not everyone is aware of what, depending on circumstances, the relativity of the “religious point of view” implies.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 25 May 1982.

I was glad to read in your letter your thoughts on the problem of Protestantism. Regarding this subject, I would like to specify further the intention of my opening paragraph—I am referring to the chapter in my book—with the help of the following image.

Imagine that two people with their child and a cat board a ferryboat to cross a river; it costs one franc per person, hence three francs total because it costs nothing for the cat. If the crossing were to cost one franc per “adult”, the child would pay nothing; but it is per “person”, and hence one must pay for the child; if it were per “creature”, then one would also have to pay for the cat. Now in speaking of three “denominations”, it is as if I were speaking of three “persons”; but this does not mean the child is an “adult” just because he is administratively a “person”. Protestantism is the child; liberal Protestantism is the cat: a child is a “person”; a cat is not a person.

Hence, according to a certain relative aspect, I place Protestantism on the same plane as that of the two old Churches, but only according to this extrinsic aspect because I take care to add: “a Christian possibility, a limited one, no doubt, and excessive through certain of its features”. Hence there is a difference in level. I depended completely on the words “a limited one, no doubt” to make the reader understand that even though there is a certain extrinsic equality, there is nonetheless a certain intrinsic inequality on another plane; but since Protestant piety is nonetheless a possible path—it is only liberal

Protestantism that is not a path—I am obliged to take note of the existence of a third “denomination”. I did not say that Catholicism is limited or that Orthodoxy is limited; I said that Lutheranism is so.

In any case, an Orthodox would tell me that the demonstration is not yet complete; I return now to the image of the ferryboat with the three persons. He would say that the two adults are of different sexes since they are the parents; if one supposed the child were a girl, then one would have a new division: only one person would be a male; the other two would be women. You see the conclusions that could be derived from this point of view with regard to the definition of the denominations: if the masculine sex symbolizes legitimacy, then only one denomination would be completely legitimate; the other two—despite the difference in age—would be more or less illegitimate, age representing here the denominational level, precisely. A Catholic could make the same argument against Orthodoxy, but I grant pre-eminence to the latter.

I fear I may have tired you with a demonstration that is perhaps quite useless, but after hesitating somewhat I allowed myself to do it because of the problem of my first paragraph. This is a mere question of emphasis, hence of dialectics.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 31 October 1972.

Speaking of Jesus and Mary I said in one of my poems: *antumā 'l-hayātu fī dīni 'r-Rahmān*, which means: there is a certain complementarity of principles or qualities, or of means, in spiritual realization, and this complementarity is personified in Isa and Maryam. Indeed there are two essential elements in the invocatory method: *Dhikr* and *Faqr*—no *Dhikr* without *Faqr*, no *Faqr* without *Dhikr*. Now *faqr* is *illatī ahsanat farjahāh*, the word *farj* referring alchemically to the heart of the *faqīr*, which must be pure from concupiscence and worldliness. Maryam carried Isa in her womb just as *Faqr* envelops *Dhikr*; and Isa is the genius of *Dhikr* in the sense that he is the genius of Inwardness, for he said: “The kingdom of Heaven is within you”, and also “but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret”: now “thy closet” is the heart.

The Prophet is at once *'abd* and *ummī*, and he therefore personifies *Faqr*; but he is also *Dhikru 'Llāh*, which means that he personifies the complementarity in question. Nonetheless the fact that the Koran mentions other Prophets traditionally allows for a mystical or devotional reference to one or another of them from the point of view of a specific element of contemplative alchemy. Even though each *Rasūl* realizes all the spiritual excellences, he appears at the same time more particularly as the “genius” of a specific excellence or specific element; and this is true not only of the Prophets but also of the Saints. For the Sufi the actualization of such a reference is a question of experience or grace.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 22 April 1982.

If the Orthodox hold—as they do—that Catholicism and Protestantism are both heresies, that they are organically linked, that they are two virtually symmetrical abuses, that one does not go without the other, it is impossible to say they are completely wrong, esoterically speaking; their opinion is at the very least instructive.

In a word, where the Catholic phenomenon exists, there will also be the Protestant phenomenon. Why? Because ever since the Middle Ages there is something “not quite right” in Catholicism; a proof of this, and it is glaring, is to be found in its outward forms. Only Orthodoxy, which has always excluded change, innovation, and so-called progress, offers perfect equilibrium and perfect beauty.

I do not know whether you have ever visited an Orthodox country; true, there are the Copts in Egypt, but I do not think you went into their churches. The first time I went to Greece, I had this deeply

moving impression: here at last is authentic Christianity—here at last are priests, churches, liturgies! For everything here reminds one of Christ, the Apostles, the early Church. What relationship is there in visual terms between a Catholic priest and the Christic *barakah*? None; the Catholic priest is for the most part a “civilized” man rather than a “primeval” man of religion; this mysterious and scandalous disparity must after all mean something. In the same vein of thought, when a false council and a false pope inverted the altars and falsified the Mass, the great majority of the Catholic world accepted it almost without flinching; this too must have a meaning as to the relativity of Catholic orthodoxy. I am speaking as an esoterist and have in mind the overall orthodoxy of Catholicism, not the validity of the old rites, which is indisputable. But as the Shiite phenomenon in Islam proves, the question of “orthodoxy”—on the exoteric plane—is not as univocal or simple as one might think at first.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 2 July 1982.

You as a Catholic accuse the Protestants of being pretentious. I lived in the canton de Vaud for forty years, and I have now lived for two years in the state of Indiana, two Protestant lands, and I can say that I know the mentality of Protestantism, all the more so because I grew up among Protestants in Basel. Mediocrity exists everywhere, and obviously it can take on a different tone depending on the religion, but as for Lutheran or Calvinist piety I can assure you it is not at all pretentious in itself. For the danger of pretentiousness entailed by an emphasis on trust or faith is compensated for and neutralized among truly pious Protestants by a sincere humility, which is nurtured by the Augustinian awareness of our irremediable helplessness, the sole remedy being the grace of Christ, which we have access to by means of faith. This Christocentric faith is carried over into a morality that appears not as a merit but as a “categorical imperative”, which is Biblical in its essence; quite simply, virtue enters into the logic of faith. This is an archetypal “argument” found also among Amidists or in the Vishnuite *prapatti*—as well as in Catholicism, more precariously, among the quietists. I have met some truly spiritual men among Protestants, especially pastors; they are not exactly analogous to pious Catholics in their *barakah*, but they attest unquestionably and quasi-existentially to a living dimension of the Gospel. That such a piety still survives four centuries after Luther means something after all.

It is in the nature of theology to over-accentuate and exclude, and this is why no theology is intellectually perfect, though there are certainly degrees in this. But there is not only the question of doctrine: there is also that of method, and a concern for method can determine a doctrinal formulation, as is basically the case with Luther, even though he himself was not aware of it.

I would have gladly preferred to spare myself from having to deal with the Protestant problem and from having to write my chapter on Lutheran Evangelicalism, but the Protestant phenomenon exists, and it is immense; sooner or later I was therefore obliged to address it. I would also just as gladly have preferred to spare myself from having to deal with Muslim theology—Lord knows how grating it can be—but I had no choice since Sufism is situated in parallel to this body of doctrine; it was a sacrifice for me because I am hardly enamored of exoterisms and would have preferred to deal only with pure metaphysics and the perennial religion, the *Sanātana Dharma*.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 20 March 1967.

There are two ways of following the Prophet, one that is general and the other particular. The first is that of any man practicing Islam at one degree or another, if this practice is sincere: he who is in Islam follows the Prophet and cannot be situated outside of him. The second way is that of *fuqarā'* who have a very particular devotion to the person of the Prophet: they know even the least incident in Muhammad's life and scrupulously follow the *Sunnah* while studying the *ahādīth* continuously; they

are as if possessed by the avataric person of the Prophet. It is a kind of exclusive *bhakti* found in certain *turuq*.

Now in order to be able to follow the Prophet this way, it must be possible for one to follow the integral *Sunnah* in addition to having a providential vocation; and this is technically impossible for us, even vocationally so. But there is something else to consider: we are marked first by our intimate knowledge of other *Avatāras* and their Laws and Wisdom and second by our awareness of the *Religio Perennis*. Moreover we are of Christian origin, and our point of departure is the *Vedānta*, and finally we live in a *kāfir* world. And given the world and times to which we belong, we are in any case under the regimen of Mercy. All these factors, and others still, enable us to understand better the significance Sayyidatna Maryam holds for us. And this cannot but please the Prophet, who knows our situation and needs and who in any case envelops us with his Presence.

The Holy Virgin is not only the link between Islam and Christianity—the summer and winter caravans in the *Sūrah* “Quraysh”, according to a certain interpretation that came to my mind—but also the personification of the *Religio Perennis*, which is rooted in the Names *Rahmān* and *Rahīm* and in the *Basmalah*; there has never been a woman superior nor even equal to her in the Semitic world, and thus she alone has the plenary right to embody Layla for us.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 11 November 1971.

On the one hand Christian morality sees the relative good represented by the preservation of the corporeal individual, and on the other hand it sees the abuse, namely gluttony; or on the one hand it sees the relative good represented by the preservation of the earthly species, and on the other hand it sees the abuse, namely lust; but unlike Islam it does not see a contemplative element between these two poles, an element transcending the relative good while in no way approaching the abuse corresponding to it. In the Koranic Paradise there is food and there are houris, even though there could be no question of any preservation of the corporeal individual or the earthly species. *Hadhā'l-ladhī razaqanā min qabl*: this verse—in its entirety—contains the whole doctrine of the metaphysical transparency of positive sensations.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 2 July 1982.

In pure metaphysics exclusive accentuations—namely, “points of view” and “aspects”—are not admissible; seeing things through colored glass is not metaphysics. But in exoterism accentuations or colorations are not just allowed; they constitute the very principle of the exoteric outlook, and they inevitably assert themselves unsparingly and with vehemence. According to Islam the only sin that will certainly not be forgiven is that of associating partners with the One God; in this perspective of Unity, the Trinity appears almost as the worst of aberrations; and this perspective has its rights since exoterism does. According to Protestantism, it is the Mass that is an abomination since it seems to replace the unique Sacrifice of Calvary, given that the Mass is presented as a sacrifice; here too the accentuation of an exclusive point of view has its rights, those of exoterism precisely. For Christianity the worst of abominations is the rejection of Christ—not believing that Christ alone saves or thinking there could be other ways than his. For Judaism the ultimate blasphemy is to believe that the *Torah*, which is meant for all eternity, could actually be abolished and replaced by something else.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 28 January 1983.

Since you have been baptized and received confirmation and have assimilated the one and universal

metaphysics, there is no reason for you to fear that the Christian form does not contain a sufficient esoteric virtuality or to ask yourself what Christianity on the one hand and Islam on the other can give you; it is enough to practice the Invocation with sincerity and perseverance, and God will take care of the rest. There are only three things that matter: metaphysical discernment, invocatory practice, nobility of character.

There is nothing preventing a Christian from invoking God alone; Saint Teresa of Avila's confessor would repeat in Spanish the Name *Dios* for hours at a time; likewise, and obviously, Arab Christians—there are many in Lebanon and Syria—can repeat the Name *Allāh*, which does not belong exclusively to Islam when considered in this manner. Although you normally pronounce the avataric Names of Jesus and Mary, your intention is to go toward God; God knows your intention, and it is He who decides on our degrees and stations. When invoking God we must not analyze the degrees of the Absolute; we are addressing That which transcends us infinitely, and this is all. The fact that certain invocatory modes are less direct than others does not prevent the results from being the same, especially since recourse to Mercy is more necessary than ever. The real link between Christianity and Islam is the Holy Virgin; she personifies at once primordial Wisdom and Mercy. In her and through her we have the same religion. And there is only one God.

But you must get rid of the confused opinions expressed in your letter. There can be no question of esoteric Islam playing the role of a “spiritual coronation” in relation to a “Christian foundation”. It is only too obvious that Muslim sages have something to offer Christians—and the reverse is true likewise—but Islam as such has nothing to add to Christianity; a traditional form is a closed system and is by definition perfect in its kind. Thus there is no possible “traditional complementarity” between the two religions; there can be no question of “grafting” the esoterism of Islam onto Christian practices. One must take great care to abstain from ambiguous speculations that risk compromising the efficacy of spiritual practices; and one must not needlessly complicate matters.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 9 May 1982.

It is a fact that empirical Islam—exoterism, at any rate—is reticent about the question of the celestial intermediary, though without being able to be entirely consistent since Gabriel and the Prophet were both intermediaries; the Prophet spoke to Gabriel, and Muslims address litanies to the Prophet. Formerly, one could hear in Morocco—I was there in an epoch when you were not yet born and when the Maghreb was still in the full Middle Ages—beggars invoking “*yā Mūlanā Idrīs*” and “*yā Sīdī ‘Abd al-Qadr*”, that is, names of saints. At Ephesus, in the Holy Virgin's house, there is a section reserved for Christians where the Mass is said and another section reserved for Muslims where the Turks come to pray; when I was there, an old Turk next to me whispered prayers in which the name “Maryam” recurred over and over. On the Christian side there were ex-votos hanging near the altar in thanksgiving for miraculous healings obtained through the Virgin; on the Muslim side there were also some votive offerings—in the form of colored ribbons—which proves that the Turks address themselves also to this feminine Mediator and obtain the same graces as Christians; I have also been told that in India Muslim women pray to the Holy Virgin for their children.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 19 April 1973.

It is not easy to situate the problem of the resurrection in a few words; it must be said first of all that it is a question of a cosmic event whose metaphysical cause is the state of fall or the disgrace of matter. All told it is a question of a return to the initial equilibrium: accursed or perverted matter must be replaced with a blessed or regenerate matter, and this change can take place only from within; a new

matter will be as it were projected from the subtle state, and this is the resurrection. It may be impossible to imagine this, but it is no less real, and it is metaphysically necessary; every disequilibrium requires a return to equilibrium.

As for the question of the afterlife—or the eschatological destiny—of animals, Semitic and monotheistic theologies deal with this only from the outside and in passing; this means that the question does not interest them since they confine themselves essentially to a consideration of the human state, which begins with human birth and is prolonged in the Paradises or hells of the human species. It is easy to grasp that Paradise is eternal since it opens to Eternity; but what is the meaning of the “eternity” of hell? This expression does not mean that it is truly eternal, which would be metaphysically and morally absurd, but simply that the damned are definitively excluded from the human Paradise; this definitive character is expressed by the wholly symbolic notion of “eternity”, which suggests something absolute or rather irreversible. In reality the damned will finally leave hell to enter into the lower transmigration, with the possibility in the end of being born into a state analogous to the human state, one that opens therefore to a Paradise analogous to the human Paradise; but the theologies are interested only in man and take into account only what concerns him. They are no more interested in animals than in the damned, or rather in their post-human destiny, to speak in theological terms; animals are “destroyed” just as damnation is “eternal”; “and let us be done with this question”.

Now animals, not being central beings like man, actually continue through transmigration, though there is a possible exception here, that of noble animals that have lived in the ambience of a saint or a sanctuary and that are absorbed upward after their death by the Paradise of this saint or the saints of the sanctuary; thus it is said that the cat of Jalal al-Din Rumi—filled with *barakah*—went to Paradise after his master.

Extract from a letter from Frithjof Schuon dated 4 April 1956.

To return to the questions discussed in my preceding letters, I will say this: the great religious happiness of a Muslim as such is Islam in all its extension; it is not *a priori* the Prophet or the Koran, but Islam; it is the happiness of plunging the individual will into all the ramifications of the Law—*sharī'ah* and *sunnah*—which is itself the crystallization of the divine Will, and of accumulating supererogatory practices and merits. In a similar way the happiness of a Christian is Christ; the Church with the sacraments is the extension of Christ, who is everything. For a Muslim it is not the Prophet but Islam—and all it comprises—that is everything, for here what matters is totality, not the center; the Prophet is the personification of totality just as Christ is the center of the cosmos; the totality—the Koran—comes “before” the Prophet just as Christ comes “before” the cosmos.

If the happiness of an ordinary Muslim is zeal in the accomplishment of the *sharī'ah* and *sunnah* and if the happiness of a Christian is in attachment to the saving divinity of Christ, where then is ours? It lies in what is common to all traditional forms: the metaphysical truth and the divine Name. Our “Islam” is conformity to the nature of things and to the divine Will manifested in it; our “Christ” is the salvific Name of God. Islam contains this Name since it contains everything that is for us in conformity to the divine Reality. Islam is surrendering oneself to the Name, and it is this Islam that encompasses our whole being. But this Islam is an essence rather than a form.

Christianity is like a dot that is red and warm, and Islam is like a surface that is green and fresh. From the point of view of *gnosis* and *tasawwuf* and *ma'rifah*, the color becomes white. But Islam also contains an element of warmth, which is *mahabbah*, and Christianity an element of freshness, which is *gnosis*.

Statements / Texts

Extract from “The Substance”

The substance of knowledge is Knowledge of the Substance; in other words the substance of human knowledge is Knowledge of the divine Substance; “he who knoweth his soul knoweth his Lord”.

The substance of the intelligence is indeed the perception of the substantial, not the accidental. When the intelligence perceives the accidental, it must do so in relation to the substantial.

Stupidity is confusion between the secondary and the essential, hence in the final analysis between accidents and substance, which means that only the sage is completely intelligent; he alone has a perfect sense of causality. Impiety is a kind of stupidity, and stupidity is a kind of impiety.

The divine Substance itself is essentially beyond the polarity subject-object; it is nonetheless accessible, whether by an objective or conceptual path or by a subjective or unitive path; the two paths must combine, for there is no union without discernment, no realization without truth.

Marginalia in a letter from a correspondent concerning the Book of Genesis, October 1975

Either we understand something through intellection or inspiration, or by rational deduction if the subject permits, and then we can formulate it, or else we do not understand it, and then we must give up trying to do so; for reason must not seek to breach the gates of Heaven. If we understand only half of something, we must have the greatness of soul—and the realism—to let go of the “missing link”; otherwise there is a risk of going around in circles from the effects of mental *māyā*. If it is a question of exegesis, then the importance of the thing becomes quite relative, and it is highly probable that we shall lack sufficient facts in many cases; a syllogism is possible only when the premises are complete.

Several interpretations of the Biblical account of creation are possible. Biblical language is never systematic. One notes that the Koran is also filled with irregularities, anachronistic enumerations, and so forth. In any case, the first man is not the principal archetype; he is its manifestation. But why does it matter to us what this or that Biblical word may mean in a given relationship as long as we know the essentials of the cosmogonic process? In any case it is inappropriate to claim that a given metaphysical or cosmological explanation of Genesis is exclusively valid and obligatory. Better to leave the interpretation of the Bible to the cabalists!

Extract from “God is Consciousness”

When a distinction is made between the impersonal Divinity and the personal Divinity, what this signifies is that God in a sense individualizes Himself for the sake of creation and in relation to man; one does not mean to deny that the Divinity is pure Consciousness, hence pure Personality, in its very Essence—in other words that it is the Self, whence are derived within Relativity all created consciousnesses.

This is what explains polytheism: from the moment that God is Personality as such, it is obvious that

each of His modes or each of His manifestations possesses a personal character; in God there is nothing unconscious.

This also explains Trinitarianism: there is no need to protest disdainfully—against Sabellius—that the *hypostases* are not modes but persons; divine modes are necessarily—and by definition—persons as soon as the divine Nature is personal; this is not because the divine Essence could have an individual character but because it is pure Consciousness and is therefore capable of individualizing itself in relation to man.

Extract from “Contents and Containers”

What do we see around us? Beings with their thoughts and desires; forms and contents. Everywhere there is nothing but forms and contents: forms unaware that they reflect Form as such, the universal Receptacle of the divine Presence, and contents unaware that they should be this Presence and that they indirectly reflect this Content.

The universal, primordial, and normative form is the pure and perfect ego—body and soul—and the universal, primordial, and normative content is the Intellect or contemplation, or the spiritual activity it involves. We could also say that the perfect form is the soul emptied of everything except spiritual content; this content is the revealed Symbol, the divine Name, which is the support of both discernment and concentration, both truth and love.

By remembering God, man no longer lives in his own form, strictly speaking; he lives in all forms, which means that he lives in none or that he is identified with the universal Form and thereby lives in the divine Content. Man must not seek to live in himself; he must let God live in him.

The perfect container is simple in and through the Remembrance of God, for not having any individual form there is nothing to distinguish it in particular; it is unique, for being every form—in and through the primordial Form—it is without a second; it is central, for not wandering from one phenomenon to another it is “here” and not “elsewhere”; it is actual, for being neither “before” nor “after” it is always “now”; and it is subtle, for not having a substance made opaque and heavy by individual coagulation it is transparent and light, which caused a Hindu sage to say that the delivered one possesses only a subtle body. In this way the perfect container realizes poverty in form, number, space, time, and substance, symbolically speaking.

Extract from “Faith Is to Say ‘Yes’”

In speaking of the “obscure merit of faith”, one has in mind an effort that makes up for the absence of objective certainty: faith is a merit because we do not see God and because it is difficult for the exteriorized and passional man, who is therefore worldly in nature, to believe in what he does not see. When the Koran speaks of those who are close to God in Paradise and who “believe in Him”, it is referring to the element of approbation or fervor, or adoration, which is the very substance of the attitude of faith and is independent of the earthly accident that is relative ignorance.

In metaphysics, good dialectic is what draws the virtuous man toward realization, hence a perfume of holiness; bad dialectic on the contrary is what blocks the way by suggesting to a man, if he lacks objectivity, that he is terribly intelligent. Beauty and doctrine do not have the function of satisfying an insatiable and therefore profane need for logical satisfaction—nor in the case of beauty of satisfying a need for harmony that is no less insatiable on the strictly earthly plane—but of bringing about a liberating intuition of essences, or Platonic remembrance if one prefers.

Faith means that love of God is the necessary complement of certainty, just as the Infinite is the

complement of the Absolute.

The very act of faith is the remembrance of God; now “to remember” is *recordare* in Latin—that is, *re-cordare*—which indicates a return to the heart, *cor*. As an act of faith, invocation in fact actualizes the immanent and paracletic certitude of the heart. The heart is faith.

Faith requires us to keep ourselves before God and to look straight ahead in the direction of God—neither to the left or right, nor into the abysses of the world, which lead to vertigo and precipitate falls. It is necessary to walk straight ahead on the crest of faith and say “yes” to the Sovereign Good, which lights our way and is the Goal.

Extract from “Beyond an Alternative”

Earthly existence is full of ambiguities because it manifests God while yet being “other than He”. Man is suspended as it were between abstraction and analogy, rejection and participation, transcendence and immanence: we encounter on the one hand the limitations and imperfections of phenomena—and in some cases their seductive magic—and on the other hand their metaphysical transparency and ennobling and interiorizing quality; the “Eternal Feminine” is both Eve and Mary. By force of circumstance—the average man being what he is—exoterism tends toward a prudent and suspicious moralism; esoterism alone possesses, in one of its dimensions, a breadth permitting it to spiritualize “sensible consolations”, which the exoteric perspective tends to ostracize, and thus—beyond the alternative “flesh or spirit”—to restore to the means of aesthetic expression, such as music and dance, their celestial intentions.

Extract from “The Argument”

The value of the ontological argument as a proof lies less in our capacity to conceive of the Absolute than in the transcendent and unique nature of the object of this capacity, which is precisely the Absolute; in other words the notion of the Absolute is absolute. It is in this sense, and not otherwise, that the ontological argument contains a proof of God, and this proof is irrefutable.

Some object that if the argument were valid anything we conceive of or imagine—no matter what—would be real *ipso facto*; this is a specious objection, for the quality of the argument as a proof lies—let us repeat—not in our mental or intellectual capacity alone but above all, and in an unconditional way, in the supreme object of this capacity; it is man’s reason for being because this supreme object is.

This does not mean that the Absolute needs rational proofs, for there is pure and direct intellection; nonetheless reason has its rights: it can help to actualize a virtual intellection and then express an effective intellection. Once again, if reason and the Intellect did not have these capacities, their existence would be inexplicable.

Extract from “The Message of Certainty”

I know with certainty that there are phenomena and that I myself am one of these phenomena.

I know with certainty that underlying the phenomena, or beyond them, is the one Essence, which the phenomena manifest only because of a quality of this Essence, that of Infinitude, hence Radiation.

I know with certainty that the Essence is good and that all goodness or beauty in phenomena manifests this.

I know with certainty that the phenomena will return to the Essence, from which they are not really

separate since fundamentally there is nothing except the Essence; that they will return to the Essence because nothing phenomenal is absolute or therefore eternal; and that Manifestation is necessarily subject to a rhythm just as it is necessarily subject to a hierarchy.

I know with certainty that the purpose of religions is to recall these truths and that religions are truthful and legitimate because they recall these truths.

I know with certainty that these truths are inscribed in the Intellect and that there is a religion of the Heart, which prefigures all religion.

I know with certainty that our reason for being is to discern the Essence in phenomena and then to return to the Essence, and this we do by abstaining from what is opposed to it and by practicing what draws us near to it; the quintessence of what draws us near the Essence is the fixation of our thought, and in a certain way our entire being, upon the Essence, which at once produces and attracts us.

I know with certainty that only the religion of the Heart is perfect, for it contains no limitation or contradiction; how could other religions be perfect since they contradict each other?

I know with certainty that in order eventually to gain access to the religion of the Heart we must take one of the revealed religions as our starting point; if this were not necessary, why would they exist?

I know with certainty that the outward manifestation of the religion of the Heart is virgin nature, for it is a book that contradicts no book and can be contradicted by none.

I know with certainty that the soul is immortal, for its indestructibility results necessarily from the very nature of intelligence.

I know with certainty that underlying the diverse consciousnesses there is only one Subject: the Self, at once transcendent and immanent, which is accessible through the Intellect, the seat or organ of the religion of the Heart; for the diverse consciousnesses exclude and contradict one another, whereas the Self includes all and is contradicted by none.

I know with certainty that the Essence, God, affirms itself in relation to phenomena, the world, as Power of Attraction and Will of Equilibrium and that we are made in order to follow this Attraction vertically, which we cannot do without conforming horizontally to the Equilibrium, which sacred and natural Laws take into account.

I know with certainty that all phenomena, inward as well as outward, reflect the Essence, whether in itself or in relation to a particular aspect; that they reflect it in a manner that is either direct or indirect, positive or negative; that this is necessarily so since there is only one Reality, that of the Essence; and that our vocation as intelligent and free creatures is to perceive and choose the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, both in ourselves and around us.

I know with certainty that evil is derived from what is illusorily other than the Essence and that it cannot not exist since the Infinitude of the Essence implies Radiation, hence Manifestation; now to say Manifestation is to say alterity and remotion; but evil, which is always fragmentary, is superabundantly compensated for, and even definitively nullified, by the good, which always expresses totality and reality, that of the Essence, which alone is.

Extract from "Colors"

There are three fundamental, essential colors: Red, Blue, Yellow: Red and Blue are heavy, so to speak; Yellow is light; Red and Yellow are warm; Blue is cold. The mixed colors are Green, Orange, Violet; Green comes first because its components, Blue and Yellow, are complementary rather than irreconcilable opposites; then come Orange and Violet, the first light and the second heavy.

As for the symbolism of colors, everyone agrees on the following meanings: Red represents intensity as well as aggressiveness; Blue represents calm, profundity, and contemplativity; Yellow should naturally be felt as a symbol of radiation or joy, but too often a malefic sense is attributed to this color: falseness, envy, hatred; this is a patent example of pseudo-symbolism.

Among the mixed colors Green represents contemplative joy, hope; Violet represents sadness and, on another plane, sacerdotal gravity as well as old age; Orange represents emotion that is lively, joyful, vital, hence also youth.

Extract from “Not To Be Lost from Sight”

The *philosophia perennis* is founded essentially and intrinsically on the nature of things as perceived by intellectual intuition; only formally and extrinsically is it founded upon a particular revealed Text, and it could never be dependent on it.

It is altogether erroneous to believe that religion in the ordinary sense of the term—including an esoterizing exoterism—is the indispensable condition and sole guarantee of intellectual intuition and of the practical consequences derived from it. The fact that all spirituality extrinsically depends on a tradition in no way signifies that the human Intellect is inoperative outside the framework of a traditional symbolism or sacramental means.

As Meister Eckhart said, “There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable; if the entire soul were such, it would be uncreated and uncreatable; and this is the Intellect.” Similarly, the Islamic formula: “The Sufi is not created.”

According to the *Brahma Sūtra*, “Man can acquire true divine Knowledge even without observing the prescribed rites; and indeed in the *Veda* there are many examples of people who neglected to perform such rites or were prevented from doing so and who nonetheless acquired true Knowledge because their attention was perpetually concentrated and focused on the supreme *Brahma*.”

In principle man—“made in the image of God”—contains everything within himself; in fact, however, he needs elements of actualization coming from the outside, hence from tradition; this does not mean that a man needs every possible support, but he does need the supports his particular nature requires. Necessity is not the only issue; there is also opportuneness; the useful is not always the indispensable.

According to Guénon, “True esoterism is something quite different from the outward religion, and if it has some connections with it, this is only to the extent it finds in the religious forms a mode of symbolic expression; moreover it matters little whether these forms are those of this religion or that since what is in question is the essential unity of doctrine lying hidden beneath their apparent diversity. This is why the initiates of old, following the established customs of the various countries in which they found themselves, participated in all the outward forms of worship without distinction. . . . Pure metaphysics is neither pagan nor Christian but universal; the mysteries of antiquity were not paganism, but they were superimposed upon it.”

It sometimes happens that the pure pneumatic will act in a manner foreign to a given religious perspective and to particular prescriptions, but he never acts in a manner contrary to the nature of things, for he bears the essential, universal, and primordial Law in the depths of his own heart. For this very reason deviation or corruption is impossible in his case, however things may appear from a particular, limited perspective.

Extract from “Vedānta, Japa, Dharma, Tantra”

These four Sanskrit terms may evoke the four principal dimensions of our Way:

Vedānta: Discernment between the Real and illusory, which implies all subsequent discernments.

Japa: Invocation; essentially, methodic Concentration on the Real.

Dharma: Virtue, the virtues; Conformity to the nature of the Real; beauty of soul, of character.

Tantra: Spiritualization—or Interiorization—of beauty as well as of the natural pleasures, in harmony with the metaphysical transparency of phenomena. All things considered: Nobility of sentiments and experiences, which excludes all excess and is inseparable from sobriety. Or again: sense of the archetypes, return to the essences, to primordality.

Extract from “To Know, To Will, To Love”

The Intelligence, the Will, and the Soul of the human being are capable of objectivity, hence of transcendence; it is because of transcendence—the possibility of knowing God—that the human mind is endowed with objectivity.

Instead of saying “Intelligence, Will, Soul” we could say “to know, to will, to love”. To know God is to discern the Absolute and the elements of absoluteness; to will God is to do what brings us near Him; to love God is to find happiness in Him. No man has the right to say he cannot love God, for man always loves something; he always aspires to some happiness; he always makes his choices.

The formulas of consecration and of gratitude—the *Basmalah* and the *Hamdalah*—integrate the contingent objects of our love into our love for the Absolute or the Infinite, which is imperative for us because we are human beings.

To know God is to understand by way of consequence that one must remember Him, that there is no other choice.

To will God is to remember Him in fact, and untiringly, while abstaining from what is opposed to this end.

To love God is to find joy and happiness in this remembrance, not in what separates us from it.

To know things in relation to God, to will them for God, to love them in God.

Extract from “Virtue, a Requisite of the Truth and the Way”

Our Character is our personality, and it is what we love in the depth of ourselves; it includes our tendencies, which influence the operation of our Intelligence and Will, though without producing them. Intelligence and Will are also part of our personality, but in themselves they are of an impersonal nature; they are faculties that do indeed belong to us, but it is our Character that is *a priori* our self.

And it is in the Character that the Virtues reside, these being fundamentally Sincerity, Fidelity, Gratitude, and Generosity. Sincerity tends toward the intellectual in the sense that it is inspired by Truth; Fidelity tends toward the existential in the sense that it refers to the Origin and to primordial Perfection. Gratitude is equivalent to Humility and is the consciousness of our dependence on something greater than ourselves; and Generosity is derived from our Liberty: it is Charity that loves to radiate.

By influencing the Intelligence, Sincerity induces it to draw all the conclusions implied in discernment: knowing the world is only an appearance, man must detach himself from it; applying Discernment to

the macrocosm, he must also apply it to the microcosm, hence to himself, for self-knowledge is the necessary consequence of knowledge of the Real as such. Gratitude prompts the Intelligence to an awareness of its dependence and thus cuts short all temptation to luciferian rationalism; to know is to submit to the Intellect. In a similar manner Fidelity, by influencing the Will, endows it with the quality of perseverance; Generosity for its part gives it a sense of moderation, averting the temptation to excessive selfishness. Thus the Virtues, though they are not able to determine the Intelligence and Will with regard to their capacities, can nonetheless determine their style or operations.

It is obvious that the fundamental Virtues are to varying degrees lacking in the man who bears the stamp of the Fall, the loss of Paradise—inward as well as outward—though without being entirely lost; their sufficient presence, however, is the *conditio sine qua non* of the Way, along with a discriminating and contemplative Intelligence and an efficient and persevering Will.

In principle the Intelligence does not need the Virtues in order to draw all the conclusions of which it is capable, but in fact it is far from being able to do so without constraint; similarly the Will should without difficulty be inspired by the directives emanating from the Intelligence, but in fact these directives are not necessarily enough for it, and it is Virtue that must come to its aid.

Obviously a child is not in full possession of his potential Intelligence or Will, but his personality may nonetheless be endowed with a thirst for the True, a sense of the Sacred, a love of Beauty, and an instinct for the Essential, hence for Greatness; and it is this above all that matters.

Extract from “Against the Abuse of an Argument”

The argument that the outward ego is not really ourselves is aimed at individualism, which lends a quasi-absolute value to the fact of being a given individual, of having certain memories and desires; the argument helps us break away from this obsession to the extent such detachment is required, for we have the right to be men.

But this spiritual argument cannot dispense with effort toward perfection, nor for all the more reason can it exonerate the sinner; that is, it cannot be brought to bear in favor of an imperfection, negligence, or sin the responsibility for which one would like to shift to something other than oneself: namely, the empirical ego precisely, hypocritically charged with “unreality”, even though the ego is morally real in the case of the sinner; otherwise the name “sinner” would not be given to one who sins.

When the soul is conscious of being attached to inward or outward phenomena to such a degree that it is drawn away from God, it is necessary to say: this ego, which I cherish and which deceives me, and which is made of images and desires, is not my true being. But when the soul is conscious of an imperfection, a sin, or a vice, one has no right to say: this sin or vice is not myself and hence does not concern me. As long as a man sins by his actions or character, he is identified with his sin. It is only after being purified and with the intention of remaining within the norm that he may tell himself: this sin was not really myself.

Once again, the argument in question operates against individualism, which seduces us and causes us to suffer, and not in favor of an imperfection about which we are complacent. In general a spiritual argument should not be used apart from its concrete intention, for otherwise one may fall into affectation and hypocrisy; the soul should not be told things that it does not understand and that therefore flatter it, so to speak. The individual has a duty to escape evil, but he does not have a duty to be sublime.

There is no Knowledge without objectivity of intelligence; there is no Freedom without objectivity of the will; there is no Nobility without objectivity of the soul. The value of the human person is

objectivity, which is at once extinction and reintegration.

Extract from “*Hikmah, Dhikr, Jamāl*”

How is *Tasawwuf* to be defined? One Sufi has said that *Tasawwuf* is “poverty”; another has said it is “fasting”; still another has said it is “the five prayers and awaiting death”. These are pious associations of ideas; they are not definitions.

If we were asked what *Tasawwuf* is, we would say it is (1) Discernment between the Real and the illusory, (2) permanent Remembrance of the Real, and (3) Beauty of soul, conformity to the Real.

Discernment between the Real and the illusory: between *al-Haqq*, the True, and *al-hijāb*, the veil; *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh*. This is *Hikmah*, the wisdom mentioned by the Koran: “He (*Allāh*) giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he hath truly received abundant good” (*Sūrah* “The Cow” [2]:269).

Permanent Remembrance of the Real: *Dhikru 'Llāh*. As the Koran says: “And the Remembrance of *Allāh* is of all things the most great” (*Sūrah* “The Spider” [29]:45).

Beauty of soul, conformity to the Real: for God loves all Beauty—*Jamāl*—since it reflects His Infinitude, His Harmony, His Goodness, and His Beatitude; and He particularly loves Beauty of soul since the inward takes precedence over the outward, and the immortal over the perishable. *Hadīth*: “Verily *Allāh* is beautiful, and He loveth Beauty.”

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Extract from “The Gordian Knot”

“Say: *Allāh*! then leave them to their vain discourse.” Thus it is that the *Dhikr* cuts through the Gordian knot of the soul’s obscurities and troubles, its states of heaviness and dispersion—in short, the inward problems that appear insoluble, whether their causes are objective or subjective or both at once.

This means that the *Dhikr* cuts through the inextricable and absurd knot of lower *māyā*, which is found in the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, in the soul as well as the world.

Man tends to argue with his own absurdity as well as with that of the world, and the adversary, who has an interest in our having troubles and forgetting God, takes advantage of the situation by involving us in an indefinite movement; this is what is called “going round in circles”. Now what we do not understand, God understands, and we attest to this fact by saying *Allāh* and turning away from all discussion about the uncertain, conjectural, indefinite, insoluble. In any event, it is necessary to know that there is always an unintelligible point in *māyā*: on the higher plane it is mystery, and on the lower it is the absurd; in one case as in the other we say *Allāh*.

To say *Allāh* is to show Confidence and Faith. For *Allāh* is the reply to everything; the soul is a question, and the supreme Name the response; or the soul is a wound, and the Supreme Name a balm.

Extract from “Silence and Word”

A word presupposes silence: it cannot be heard in the midst of noise. Silence must be perfect to the extent the word is noble. This is why *dhikr* requires *faqr*: the Name *Allāh* is fully pronounced only if the soul is extinguished for it.

When there is extinction of soul there is virtue. The soul is virtuous when it is as God created it: vices are privations, or they are superimposed defects. The primordial soul—extinguished, silent—is the “lotus” (*padma*) that contains the “jewel” (*manī*); it is this lotus the Blessed Virgin personifies. She is the “peace” (*salām*) that conveys “blessing” (*salāt*). Or she is the holy “silence” (*hesychia*) that contains the divine Word (*Logos*), the Name.

But in reality this “silence” is life: “I am black, but beautiful.” Let the fallen soul remain silent—*vacare Deo*—and the divine Qualities will be mirrored in it, Qualities whose traces it bears in its very substance.

Truth and beauty are paths toward holy silence: they bring about the remembrance of our paradisiacal substance. For this silence is made of truth and beauty; it is an emptiness that in reality is plenitude.

Extract from “*Faqr Equals Fitrah*”

Tawhīd, Dhikr, Faqr: “Testimony to Unity”, “Remembrance of God”, “Poverty”; that is, Truth, Way, and Virtue.

What is the relationship between Virtue and “Poverty”? To be “poor” is to be as God created us, without adding any artifice, any attitude of pride; it is to remain conformable to the *Fitrah*, the primordial Nature.

The Koran says: “O men, ye are the poor in relation to God, and God is the Rich, the universally Praised.” This means that everything the creature possesses *a priori*—his qualities and faculties—he has from the Creator, who is the source of every good and to whom belong all merits. This is why it may be said that virtue is “to be what we are”, what we are through the creative Will.

Tawhīd, Dhikr, Faqr: On the one hand there is something we must know, which is the True; something we must will, which is the Good; and something we must love, which is the Beautiful. On the other hand there is something we must at once know, will, and love, which is the True, the Good, and the Beautiful: Truth, Way, and Virtue. One knows the Truth, but at the same time one wills and loves it, for it is likewise a Good and a Beauty.

To know is to be aware of the nature of a given reality; to will is to be incited to action by a given reality; to love is to experience happiness through a given reality. In a certain sense to love and to be

coincide: what we love calls us to union; what we must love is also what we must be. To love God is to “be” God within the limits of our possibilities, and this means precisely that we must tend toward God “with all our being”.

“Love God with all thy strength, and love thy neighbor as thyself”, which means that we must *a priori* love ourselves; now to love myself is to love what God wished to realize in creating me, hence to love my primordial Nature, the *Fitrah*, and as a consequence *Faqr*, Virtue aiming toward the Creator; it is in sum to love the “Kingdom of God that is within you”. And what I am, the “neighbor” is also; to love myself is to love him. And since we want God to have pity on us—“the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”—we must have pity on others; this is another reason for loving our neighbor.

From another point of view, Heaven asks us to “hate our soul”; in this case it is not our primordial Nature that is in question—obviously—but that counterfeit which is the concupiscent soul; this soul we must “hate” in the neighbor just as we do in ourselves, for otherwise there would be neither intelligence nor justice. To hate our soul is to realize, precisely, that it is not ourselves; for what Love asks us to become is what we are in the depths of our Heart.

Extract from “The Alternative”

It is necessary to pass from the abstract notion to concrete awareness; this is the passage from hypocrisy to sincerity. Most men who admit that God takes precedence over everything and that the hereafter is better than the here-below behave as if they did not admit it; this is the most usual hypocrisy.

The *Shahādah* expresses an alternative not only between the Real and the illusory—this is its metaphysical meaning—but also between the here-below and the hereafter and between the Remembrance and heedlessness. The *Nafy* expresses the illusory, or the here-below—the world of impermanence—or heedlessness; the *Ithbāt* expresses the Real, or the hereafter—the world of permanence—or the Remembrance.

In the *Nafy* the word *lā* symbolizes the separative, illusory, and impermanent side of the world; the word *ilāha* refers then to the participative, symbolic, unitive side, that is, to things that allow celestial archetypes to appear through them; this symbolism encompasses everything that by its nature brings us nearer to God, whether these values are objective or subjective, natural or spiritual. In the *Ithbāt* the word *illā* symbolizes the created element within the celestial hereafter; the Name *Allāh* very clearly expresses the Uncreated.

The Invocation, and all that favors it, is the “earthly Heaven”; Paradise is the “heavenly Earth”.

Terrestrial beauty attaches the *ghāfil* to the world and removes the *dhākir* from the world; it draws the *dhākir* closer to Heaven, for he knows that it manifests the divine *Rahmah*; and since he sees how *Rahmah* is already beautiful in its earthly manifestation, he chooses *Rahmah*, not the world.

Among believers the *dhākirūn* are those who accept the *Shahādah* with sincerity to some degree or other, contrary to the *ghāfilūn*. To realize spiritual sincerity it is necessary for the soul to pass from abstract thought to concrete awareness: it does not suffice to believe in Paradise; it is necessary to live within it in a certain fashion, and one does so in and by the *Dhikr*, which is like a prolongation and anticipation of Paradise or which—more profoundly and truly—is even identified with the celestial Abode in the sense that it is of the same substance of *Rahmah*.

For where the Name of God is, there is *Rahmah*, and there is Paradise.

Extract from “Metaphysics of the Name”

The Name *Allāh* contains two syllables, one short and one long, which betoken two hypostatic mysteries, namely, the Absolute and the Infinite, or the combination—one could say—between the Absolute and its dimension of Infinitude. The absolute is what admits no augmentation or diminution, hence what excludes all relativity; and the infinite is what contains no limitation, either extrinsic or intrinsic. With regard to spatial symbolism the Absolute and the Infinite suggest, respectively, the geometric point and extension, the first indicating pure Essence, and the second All-Possibility. The potentiality of the Absolute Principle is infinite; it is because necessary Being includes possible being that the world exists.

In addition to spatial symbolism there is also temporal symbolism: the relationship point-extension corresponds to the relationship instant-duration; such a parallelism at the very basis of existence must have a metaphysical foundation. Incontestably, space is static and time dynamic; now space relates to Substance—ether gives proof of this—and time to Energy; the divine Principle is at once Substance and Energy, and each of these aspects implies both Absoluteness and Infinitude, which is another way of saying that the Absolute is at once static and dynamic—if it can be so expressed—and the same is true of the Infinite. It is therefore not only the *hypostases* of Absoluteness and Infinitude that meet or are combined in the divine Nature, but also the *hypostases* of Substantiality and Energy or of Consciousness and Power—Consciousness because the Principle is the Self, and Power because the Principle radiates and determines all. God is Intelligence and Will and is such absolutely and infinitely, Will being the intrinsic consequence of Intelligence. To know is to will, and to know the Good is to love; “God is Love”.

God is “He Who is”; “I am that I am.” To be is to radiate; a reality radiates to the extent it is; pure Being is pure Radiation.

The Name *Allāh* not only contains two syllables, one short and one long, but also—within each syllable—two sounds, a vowel and a consonant, namely, the sounds *a* and *l*, the vowel indicating Substance and the consonant Energy. The *hā* at the end is a final synthesis, which is proven by its association with the word *Huwa*, “He”, which signifies the Essence. The vowel *a* is static, and it expresses Substance because it is in itself an invariable “extension”; the consonant *l* is dynamic, and it expresses Energy because it is a “compression”, hence a “becoming”.

To this doctrine of the *Ism* is joined that of the *Shahādah*, the four words of which—*lā ilāha illā 'llāh*—signify respectively: Manifestation as such, the reflection of the Principle in Manifestation, the prefiguration of Manifestation in the Principle, the Principle as such.

Extract from “Islamic Esoterism and Esoteric Islam”

By “Islamic esoterism” we mean that esoterism comes first and Islam afterward: in other words the esoterism is the sole essence, sufficient unto itself, and Islam is the form or framework, although there are other forms and frameworks.

By “esoteric Islam” we mean on the contrary that Islam comes first and esoterism afterward: in other words Islam is the divine Revelation and thus the basis, and esoterism is its essence perceived *a posteriori*; the essence is given by Islam, which thus presents itself as the *conditio sine qua non* of *gnosis*. According to this way of looking at things, Islam is the starting point of esoterism, whereas according to the preceding perspective metaphysics is the starting point, choosing for itself this or that exoteric framework if it does not find itself within one already, for in the latter case what is involved is more a question of taking advantage of a preexisting framework than an actual choice. But in no case

can the path of *gnosis* have as its starting point an anthropomorphist, voluntaristic, individualistic, and sentimental theology, or a legalism of the same kind.

In Islamic terms: is the beginning of the Path (*Tarīqah*) the exoteric Law (*Sharī'ah*) or the esoteric Truth (*Haqīqah*)? The whole question is to know the level of the esoterism; if it is pure, its starting point must be an element already stemming from Knowledge.

Extract from “The Divine Name as Answer”

The supreme Name, like the *Shahādah*, is an answer. It answers the world, and it answers the ego; every time the world holds up before us one or another of its masks, let us answer: *Allāh*; and every time the ego puffs itself up, let us answer: *Allāh*.

The world is a vast current of forms; the ego is its living kernel, which vivifies illusion with its blood. The Name, like an icebreaker, traverses the current of forms, this hardened web of world and ego, which at the same time consists only of mist. The world is the nothingness that hides itself behind a thousand masks; each of these masks wants to draw the ego away from God. The ego is a drop of the Self that has become ice, mask, and nothingness, and yet at the same time remains itself; this is its inner contradiction.

God has given us His Name so that we might become once again what we are; the Name melts our ice, removes the mask, and vanquishes the nothingness. When the ego swells up, it forgets its Self and wants to become a mask; it denies its profound otherness and professes its belief in the delusive current of forms. And the nothingness is as it were a mask of God; to vanquish the nothingness means to see God behind all things.

Life, with its two dimensions of past and future, is our participation in the current of forms, our inwovenness in the world; whoever answers the world with *Allāh* and the ego with *Allāh* answers life also with *Allāh*. World, life, ego: in the center is the supreme Name, which nothing can withstand.

Extract from “*Al-Khalwah*”

According to the Shaykh al-Alawī, the profound meaning of religious practices and the reason they exist is the remembrance of *Allāh*, which means that all the *sharī'ah*, all the dogmas, all the practices reside in the *dhikr*. One may be prevented by circumstances from fulfilling a particular prescription of the Law; one can never be prevented from remembering God.

The *sharī'ah* was revealed in time whereas the *haqīqah* has no beginning; it was before the creation of the world. The *sharī'ah* is bound to the *haqīqah*, but the *haqīqah* is not bound to the *sharī'ah*. *Spiritus autem ubi vult spirat*.

Extract from “Closing the Eyes and Pronouncing the Name”

When the *faqīr* closes his eyes and pronounces the Name—in any circumstances, but before God and not before men—he manifests or realizes something very great; for these two actions or attitudes represent the whole Way.

To close the eyes is in fact to exclude the world, and to pronounce the Name is to affirm God. Excluding *Māyā* and affirming *Ātmā*.

Closing the eyes is the *Nafy* of the *Shahādah* (*lā ilāha*); pronouncing the Name is the *Ithbāt* (*illā 'Llāh*).

Extinction of the accidents on the one hand; appearance of the Substance on the other. This is *Faqr* and *Dhikr*; and this is why these two elements contain the whole Way.

Nafy (or *Faqr*): “I am black . . .”; *Ithbāt* (or *Dhikr*): “. . . but beautiful”. And likewise: “I sleep, but my heart waketh.”

Referring to the quaternary *Haqq*, *Qalb*, *Faqr*, *Dhikr*, we shall say: *Faqr* combines *Haqq* and *Qalb*, for passive Perfection (*Faqr*) is realized as a result of Truth (*Haqq*) and through the Heart (*Qalb*); similarly, *Dhikr* combines *Haqq* and *Qalb* for the same reason, but applied to active Perfection (*Dhikr*).

And referring to the ternary *Makhāfah*, *Mahabbah*, *Ma'rifah*, we shall say: the operative coincidence *Faqr/Dhikr* may take place through Fear or Effort, through Love or Grace, or through Knowledge or Evidence, or again through all three at the same time and apart from any dimensional or modal intention.

In certain sacred images—notably those of the Buddha—the human Word or deified Man has the eyes closed and the breast naked: this is the non-manifestation of what is outward and the manifestation of what is inward; non-manifestation (or extinction) of the world and manifestation (or exteriorization) of the Heart or Self. To the interiorization of what is outward responds the exteriorization of what is inward; the first act corresponds to *Faqr*, and the second to *Dhikr*.

Extract from “The Absolute Argument”

The Name *Allāh* is the absolute Argument in the face of that cascade of absurdities which is the world. Therein lies an invincible axiom leaving no room for discussion; to ask “why” is already to disbelieve. The Name *Allāh* is our refuge from the din of earthly existence; the world, however it may rage, cannot possibly offer an argument stronger than this Name. We have no right to dash ourselves against the wall of the absurd, and we cannot put the blame on All-Possibility. The divine Name answers intellectually and existentially all problems, whether we are aware of this or not. To pronounce the divine Name is at once to die and be reborn.

“Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Unpublished “Comments”, Spring 1963.

It is altogether unfair to attribute to the Catholic Church alone the refusal to recognize the validity of other religions. There is no religion that recognizes equivalent traditions outside itself, and it is “materially” impossible, so to speak, that such a religion could exist, for how and in what form would it recognize other traditions? Would it do so by means of a criteriology or enumeration? Neither could be realized in practice.

Every religion is “a dogmatic authority with the mission of teaching faith and morals”; Catholicism did not need the Council of Trent for that.

That the Church condemned Meister Eckhart is no more astonishing than the fact that the ‘*ulamā*’ condemned al-Hallaj. If *gnosis* was suppressed in the West, this is no more the fault of the Church than that of the Western race. The Church’s attitude reflects the lack of aptitude Europeans have for pure metaphysics.

As for Angelus Silesius, one must not forget that his *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* was published with the assent of the Church; and yet one finds there the boldest and most purely “jnanic” formulations.

One could never affirm that “esoterism is not subject to any external criteria”; if the sacraments have an esoteric character, this results on the contrary from their nature and dogmatic definition, at least with respect to Baptism, Confirmation, and “Communion”.

The compliments made by ecclesiastical authorities today toward other religions proves absolutely nothing from the universalist point of view. It merely proves that the truth is put aside and that doctrinal rigor is replaced with a saccharine and democratic fog of “good will”.

A refusal to recognize other religions is not a part of “it must needs be that offences come”. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,” Christ said. Recognition of other forms is never more than an intellectual and spiritual accident. We are no longer living in the *Krita-Yuga*, and Christ knew this. But if we accidentally have a knowledge belonging to the spirit of the *Krita-Yuga*, it is certainly not Christ who will oppose himself to it, and he will not be the one to ask us to give account of this knowledge to creatures of the *Kali-Yuga*, be they even theologians. It is not for nothing that he spoke of “pearls and swine”. We owe an account to God alone for our metaphysical and universalist ideas.

Extract from “God-Consciousness”

The deepest nature of man—and thus the most real—is consciousness of God; it is for this that he was created. There is an outward man and an inward man; the first is submerged by sensory impressions, and the second is turned toward God: toward God who is the true Self of man.

It is said that in Heaven man enjoys the beatific vision, which is another expression for God-consciousness. Man can already participate in this vision here on earth precisely through the divine consciousness that is accessible to him and whose supports are the supreme Truth and the divine Name. It is in the invocation, illumined by the supreme Truth, that man is really himself; the invocation is his true being.

When this God-conscious invocation has become second nature for us, the question of knowing who we are or what we have been no longer arises: “All is well that ends well”, the proverb says. We must become what we bear within ourselves from the Creator: our station before Him; and this in a certain sense was before the Creation. For since God is eternal, the consciousness of God may itself also be called eternal. Let this be your thought! All the rest is in God’s hands.

Extract from “Space, Time, Existence, Consciousness”

Space involves two essential Determinations: the Point and Extension or the Center and the Periphery; now inasmuch as the *Dhikr* is active or dynamic Perfection or the content, it corresponds analogically to the first element, and inasmuch as *Faqr* is passive or static Perfection or the container, it corresponds analogically to the second element.

Next, Space involves three Dimensions: Width, Height, and Depth or Length; and these can signify analogically *Makhâfah*, *Mahabbah*, and *Ma’rifah*.

Finally, one can distinguish six Directions in Space: North, South, East, West, Zenith, and Nadir; thus Abstention, Confidence, Accomplishment, Contentment, Discernment, and Union; or Void, Life, Act, Peace, Transcendence, Immanence.

In this way the whole Path is prefigured by Space and in Space.

Extract from “Criteria of the Spiritual Man”

The first criterion of spirituality is that man demonstrate his consciousness of the incommensurability between the Real and the illusory, the Absolute and the relative, *Âtmâ* and *Mâyâ*, God and the world.

The second criterion is that man demonstrate his choice of the Real: that he understand the imperious necessity for active attachment to the Real, hence for a concrete, operative, and salvific relationship with God.

The third criterion is that man, knowing that the Real is the Sovereign Good and that it thus contains and projects all beauty, conform himself to it with all his soul; for what he knows to be perfect and what he wishes to attain, he must also be, and this he is through the virtues and not otherwise.

Man possesses an intelligence, a will, and a soul: a capacity for understanding, a capacity for willing, and a capacity for loving. Each of these three faculties contains an essential and supreme function, which is its reason for being and without which we would not be men, a function determined by the Real and contributing to salvation. Total knowledge, free will, and disinterested love; intelligence capable of absoluteness, will capable of sacrifice, soul capable of generosity.

All the dogmas, all the prescriptions, and all the means of a religion have their sufficient reason in the three fundamental vocations of man: in discernment, in practice, and in virtue. And all the gifts and means of a religion man bears within himself, but he no longer has access to them because of the fall: whence precisely the necessity—in principle relative—of outward forms, which awaken and actualize man’s spiritual potentialities, but which also risk limiting them; whence in addition the necessity of esoterism.

The criterion of an authentic spirituality is not only consciousness of the primacy of *Âtmâ* and the relativity of *Mâyâ*, then the practice of a realizational and unitive method combined with the sincere practice of the virtues, but also—as a formal condition—a regular attachment to an intrinsically orthodox religion. It is only thus that a man presents himself as a “valid interlocutor” on the spiritual plane, first in relation to God and then in relation to his fellow men.

The spiritual life, we repeat, is first our consciousness of the nature of God, then our relationship with God, and finally the conditions for this relationship, both moral and traditional; for spirituality requires not only the conformation of our character to the divine Norm, but also extrinsically our integration into a sacred system.

There are two particularly pernicious pitfalls in the spiritual life: individualism and phenomenism. The first consists in always considering oneself and in talking too readily about oneself; the second consists in always considering phenomena and in speaking of them improperly. All this is horizontal, not vertical; it is in accordance with *Mâyâ*, not in accordance with *Âtmâ*. One must never lose sight of our fundamental points of reference, the pillars of the Way. They must always shine through the manifestations of our immortal personality.

Extract from “To Avoid the Snare of Signs”

An incident that appears to be a bad omen may not necessarily have this significance; it may signify either the exhaustion of a negative possibility, or an ambush of the devil seeking to trouble us in our thoughts or actions or to drive us into sadness, or again simply a paradox of *Mâyâ* having no other meaning than the play of contrasting possibilities. In this last case the ruse can be foiled by presence of mind and by way of a corrective stratagem: thus the Prophet, having fallen from his camel, said upon getting up, “Once in a lifetime God abases the one whom He has raised above everyone”; and thus

Caesar, having taken a fall upon landing in Africa, said as he rose, “Scarcely am I in Africa, and I hold it between my two hands”—attitudes that have the quasi-magical virtue of neutralizing the caprice of *Mâyâ*, first within the soul and then with regard to others.

When the crown falls from the king’s head at the moment of his coronation, this is assuredly a bad sign; but if it falls at some other moment, it may simply mean that God alone is King, and this reminder will be good for everyone.

In case of a bad sign—but this interpretation may itself be false—a man ought to say to himself: if this is the sign of something destined for me or something “written” (*maktûb*), hence something willed by God, I accept it in advance; for everything is ultimately for the good for a man who believes in God and who prays; the essential is to end up with God whatever the accidents along the path. This reflex produces in the soul resignation and serenity; and serenity is in harmony with devotion and the sense of the Sacred.

The contemplative who is penetrated by these qualities—which coincide with the love of God—will be able to proceed in an opposite sense: he will not come to serenity by way of resignation, but he will realize resignation by way of serenity; for nothing and no one can rob us of the supreme Good, unless we do so ourselves in our impatience and ingratitude. And where God is—in our Heart as in Heaven—there is Goodness, Beauty, Beatitude (*Rahmah*); whoever keeps himself close to this Treasure is at the Source of all he loves.

Extract from “The Wheel”

The body is a tissue of sensations and instincts; the ego is a tissue of images and desires. All this is part of the current of forms, which is not our true Self. The supreme Name is the expression and receptacle of our true Self; it is not really part of the current of forms; in it we are perfectly ourselves. It is the “form of the Non-formal”—or “the Supra-formal”—and the “manifestation of the Non-manifest”. Shankara says: “Distinguish between the ephemeral and the Real, repeat the Holy Name of God, and thus calm the agitated mind.”

The man who has been seized by the supreme Name, he in whom the Name has firmly established itself to the point of becoming second nature, possesses a mind so different from that of the ordinary man—the man still imprisoned in the tumult of this lower world—that a sudden transition from the profane to the sanctified mind would amount to a mortal rupture. The outer rotation of a wheel must be compared with its inner rotation, which takes place near the hub: it is the same wheel, the same movement, but the inner rotation is center and cause, whereas the outer rotation is circumference and effect. And since there can be no sudden transition from one degree of reality to another—except by a grace man is unable to command—it is of the utmost importance that he should place his life, his thoughts, and his wishes within the framework of the Tradition; thus many shocks will be neutralized in advance, many oppositions will be smoothed out, and many hardnesses will be gradually dissolved.

“I sleep, but my heart waketh”: the ego sleeps, absorbed by the Name; but the Self, made present by the Name, is in the state of eternal waking. The Self radiates through the eyes that sleep.

The ego affirms itself most noisily where the movement of the wheel is quickest: just as agitated water is scattered into innumerable drops, so the Self is as if segmented at the edge of the cosmic wheel into innumerable souls. The current of forms—which is illusory—is at once movement and division; where the rotation is, there the scattering of egos takes place, the ego being a consequence of the universal rotation. Where all is calm, there the Self is, eternal and indivisible; where the center is, there is Oneness. And since the cosmic wheel is none other than the Self, there is no point at which the Self

may not rise up like a saving miracle.

Extract from “Islam and Christianity”

If we situate ourselves within the framework of Islam, we nevertheless can find Christ in it; and if we situate ourselves within the framework of Christianity, we nevertheless can find Islam in it.

“Christ” in Islam is to see Jesus not as the only Savior but as the esoteric Genius of Inwardness (and not formalism or legalism).

“Islam” in Christianity is to see Christ not only as the saving Manifestation of the Absolute but also—and above all—as a Manifestation (among others) of the saving Absolute.

“Christ in Islam”: essence and not form, substance and not accident, quality and not quantity.

“Islam in Christianity”: the Absolute manifested and not an absolute Manifestation.

The question is not whether we choose Islam or Christianity, but whether we discern the Absolute in every religion and whether we understand that the Invocation of the Absolute contains all religious practice.

Christianity: “God became man that man might become God.” The Absolute (Necessary Being) came to the contingent (possible being) that the contingent might return to the Absolute. Saving Manifestation.

Islam: “There is no divinity but the only Divinity.” There is no absolute but the only Absolute. Saving Truth.

Extract from “Foundation of the Islamic Argument”

In relation to Monotheism considered as such, Judaism stabilized but “confiscated” the Message; Christianity universalized but “altered” it; Islam in turn restored it by stabilizing and universalizing it.

The Christian perspective is essentially determined by divine Manifestation—a theophany that redounds upon the very conception of God—and this Manifestation gives rise to a mysticism of Sacrifice and Love. This anthropotheism, so to speak—together with the Trinitarianism resulting from it—is certainly one spiritual possibility among others, but it is not Monotheism in itself. Now Islam, which represents Monotheism in itself and nothing else, is logical in reproaching Christianity for not bringing out the full value of the Message of Monotheism and for replacing it with another Message, that of divine Manifestation. Islam is equally logical in reproaching Judaism for having unduly nationalized Monotheism and for having monopolized prophecy—for wanting God to belong to the Jews alone and for passionately opposing any prophecy outside Israel, even in the Abrahamic line as in the case of Islam. Certainly Mosaism and Christianity are intrinsically orthodox, but this is beside the point when it is a question of disengaging the essential Message of Monotheism, which is what Islam intends to do. This being said, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is God Himself who successively manifests different aspects of the one Truth, whatever men may do.

Christianity can be characterized by this paraphrase of a Patristic formula: the Interior became exterior in order that the exterior might become Interior. The One God of Monotheism as such—the God of Abraham—is in practice replaced by the Interior God, who exteriorizes Himself out of love while exteriorizing Himself already *in divinis*, whence the Trinity; and the divine Law concerning the exterior

is abandoned and replaced by a Law of Inwardness, namely, the sacraments and evangelical counsels. In its intoxication with Inwardness—hence with nonexteriority—the newborn Church abandoned the advantages of the prudent and sagacious Mosaic Law along with its Pharisaic exaggerations, depriving itself thereby of many a factor of health and equilibrium; the premises of this attitude are to be met with already in the Gospel, where it is said that the disciples, in the name of the primacy of inward purity, did not wash their hands before meals, and other characteristics of this kind. The outward Law was replaced on its own plane by Roman Law and a few elements of Germanic Law; the consequences of this were grave. The universality of the Church abolished the world of Abraham; the universality of Islam, on the contrary, spreads it everywhere.

Islam thus reproaches Christianity for having conceived the Trinity to the detriment of Unity as such and for having renounced an outward Law of sacred character while assuming the function of an integral religion. And it reproaches Judaism for having rejected Jesus, a Jewish Prophet, and for having enclosed the One God within Israel, thus reducing Him to being the King of a people—He, the King of the Universe. The fact that these judgments are clothed with an imagery, sensibility, and logic that are more or less Bedouin takes nothing away from their profound significance; on the contrary it is a question here of the point of view of Monotheism as such and nothing else, for the intrinsic truth of the Mosaic and Christic perspectives is not at issue. The monotheistic Idea is that God is One and that being One He is Universal; He is not three-fold in His absoluteness, and He does not belong to any single people; it is according to this perspective alone that Islam judges the other religions.

All of this is in accordance with the “egocentric” logic—if one may so express it—of every religious crystallization.

Extract from “The Shut Door”

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.” This saying of Sayyidna Isa means that it is necessary to leave the world outside during the Invocation. It is necessary to shut the door of the heart.

Leave the world outside: not only the outer world but also the inner world; not only the accidents—preoccupations, enjoyments, or cares—coming from the world that surrounds us but also the accidents coming from the soul, from its tendencies and reactions. It is necessary to leave outside the accidents and enclose oneself in the Substance—in the *Ism*-sacrament, which is Substance manifested. The Substance has become accident that the accident might become Substance.

Shutting the door of the heart is an essential aspect of *Faqr*; and there is no perfect *Dhikr* without perfect *Faqr*.

The same meaning is found in two other sayings: “Let the dead bury their dead”; and likewise, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Faqr must be sweet, satisfied, generous; a bitter or pretentious *Faqr* is satanic; it is inflation, not poverty.

To shut the door of the heart: not to be concerned with what remains outside; to entrust it to God; He will take care of it. To abandon the accidental to God, not to cling to it with disquiet.

The supreme Name means “there is no god but God.” Now we cannot combine a reservation in the form of some care or other with this Truth; we cannot accept the Truth conditionally; we cannot put the accidental alongside the Substance. The *Shahādah*—hence the Name—extinguishes the accidents of the soul as well as those of the world. The Substance contains all that we love, and She is what we are.

The veil that separates Sayyidatna Maryam from the world is the shut door of the heart. In the *Shahādah* it is the *Nafy* that opens the way to the *Ithbāt*: without negation there is no affirmation. The Virginity of Mary is the condition for the divine Presence. “I am black, but beautiful”: to pray “in secret”.

Extract from “Truth and Presence, Islam and Christianity”

The saving Manifestation of the Absolute is either Truth or Presence, but never exclusively one or the other, for as Truth it includes Presence, and as Presence it includes Truth. Such is the nature of all theophanies.

Islam is founded upon the axiom that the Truth saves; its exoteric limitation is the axiom that only the Truth saves, not Presence.

Christianity is founded upon the axiom that a particular Presence saves; its exoteric limitation is the axiom that only this particular Presence saves, not any other, and that only Presence saves, not Truth.

Islam: it is necessary to accept the Truth with Intelligence, Will, and Love, this being what constitutes Faith. In other words it is necessary to know the True, then to will it, then to love it; it is then that Truth saves us. For to accept sincerely—or really know—is also to will and love.

Christianity: it is necessary to accept the Presence with Love, therefore with Will, therefore also with Intelligence, this being what constitutes perfect Love of God. In other words it is necessary to love That which is Present, then to will it, then to know it; it is then that Presence saves us.

Truth: it is necessary to draw from it all the consequences; it is thus that we become what we are; for the True is not only transcendent; it is also immanent.

Presence: it is necessary to enter into its mold; it is thus that we become what we are; for That which is Present is not only immanent; it is also transcendent.

The element Truth in Christianity: to understand that the immanent Christ—the Heart that is Love and Intellect—is none other than God. To understand that Manifestation is none other than the Principle, whether in the Microcosm or the Macrocosm. It is this science of Identity that constitutes Christian *gnosis*.

The element Presence in Islam: to acknowledge that the Koran—and with it the Prophet—is none other than God; to enter through the *Sunnah* into the Muhammadan mold; sacramental reading of the Koran; the divine Name as Presence and Sacrament. The Heart is the immanent Koran or immanent Prophet.

Islam: the Truth is that the world is illusory, that God alone is real, the illusory or the contingent being prefigured in the Real or the Absolute and the Real or the Absolute being reflected in the contingent.

Christianity: the Presence is that of God in the world, of the Absolute in the contingent, of the Infinite in the finite.

Islam: the Presence is that of the Real in the illusory or the True in the false: the Koran, the Prophet, the *Sunnah*.

Christianity: the Truth is that the Manifestation of God—whether transcendent or immanent, macrocosmic or microcosmic—is none other than God Himself.

For Muslims only the Truth of the Absolute saves, whence their tendency to undervalue in Christianity the element Presence in all its aspects, whereas for Christians only Presence—or this particular Presence—saves, whence their tendency to underestimate all Platonism, that is, every perspective of

saving Truth. But both spiritualities—or both esoterisms—rejoin each other in the Heart, which is at once immanent Truth and immanent Presence.

The invocation of the Name is the Way of the *Religio Perennis*: for in the Name, Truth is Presence, and Presence is Truth; the Name is at once Truth and Presence.

It could also be said that the doctrinal Enunciation—the *Shahādah*—refers more particularly to the element Truth and the divine Name to the element Presence. The Name is the Presence that gives the Truth, and the Enunciation is the Truth that gives the Presence.

Extract from “The Two Ways of Connection”

By the very nature of things, man is connected with God in two ways, one that is direct and the other indirect; this follows from his very existence. It results in other words from the duality *Ātmā-Māyā*.

On the one hand the relationship between man and God is direct; man stands alone before God. On the other hand the relationship is indirect; man calls upon a heavenly interlocutor—a mediator—the *Logos*. In both cases it is God who hears and answers.

Islam and some other religions emphasize the first way of connection; Christianity and some other religions emphasize the second; but never in an exclusive manner. In Hinduism the two ways of connection are in balance.

There are Sufis who claim a mystical connection with a particular Prophet: they are *Ibrāhīmī*, *Mūsāwī*, *ʿĪsāwī*, as may be seen from the *Fusūs al-Hikam* of Ibn Arabi. It is thus that the Shaykh of our *Tarīqah* is *Maryamī*—the Shaykh al-Alawi having been unquestionably *ʿĪsāwī*, whence his stress on inwardness and his detachment with respect to forms. The *Hikmah Maryamīyyah* coincides quite obviously with the *Hikmah ʿĪsāwīyyah*, while adding to the latter an element of femininity, beauty, virginity, and maternity—an accentuation of sanctifying receptivity, adamant purity, and appeasing and salvific goodness.

Every *Tarīqah* is by definition *Muhammadīyyah*; to say Islam is to say Muhammad.

Extract from “Where is Paradise?”

All is well whenever we utter the Supreme Name with the right intention. As for the world and the life we leave behind us, they are in God’s hands.

And this leads us to the following considerations. It is natural for a man to tell himself: “I want to be wherever Paradise is”—in other words where I feel happy, in surroundings that correspond to my nature. But it is much more perfect, or rather it already partakes of the supernatural, to express oneself thus: “Wherever I am, there is Paradise”—in other words to have understood that happiness is our relationship with God and that this relationship is “within you”. The key to this relationship is prayer —“pray without ceasing”—and therefore also, and even above all, quintessential prayer: the universal and primordial sacrament of the Name. Wherever this Name is, there is the Presence of God; and wherever this Presence is, there is my Paradise. For to say “God” is to say “Sovereign Good”: the unchangeable and inalienable Essence of all goods, all happiness, and all beatitude. “If there is a Paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here”: in the Supreme Name.

In the heavenly beyond the outward and inward coincide to a certain extent in the sense that one can see nothing without seeing God; this is why it is said—symbolically and not otherwise—that the hours are transparent. But in truth this is how it is already on this earth: for the spiritual man every positive

phenomenon is transparent and archetypal, everything testifying to the Sovereign Good; nobility is to have a sense of the archetypes, hence of the divine Intentions.

“On the Holiness of the Name”

When we say that the Name of God is an effect of the divine Cause, this signifies: in the domain of language, to which all words and all names pertain. Now it goes without saying that, if the word “God” is an effect of the divine Cause, it is not so in a merely general sense as is the case for example with the words “stone” or “tree” for we call the word “God” an effect of the divine Cause because, precisely, its content is God and nothing else, and because, in consequence, the fact of thinking or of pronouncing this word has an effect other than that of thinking or pronouncing the words “tree” or “stone”. When I say “tree”; nothing happens; when on the other hand I say “God”, God listens to me, whether I invoke Him, whether I recognize His reality, or again, whether on the contrary I abuse his Name, and it is for this reason that it is said: “Hallowed be Thy Name”. More-over, writing belongs to the domain of language as well; and here also there is a quasi-magical difference between the inscription “God” and any other inscription; for God is not indifferent towards my manner of treating the inscription “God”, while He is indifferent toward my manner of treating the inscription “tree”, “stone”, “house” or “mountain”. This is so because God is the witness at once transcendent and immanent of all that happens, whether it be in the exterior world or within the soul; to the degree that we understand this through direct knowledge, or that we apprehend it through faith,— the one does not exclude the other,—we are able to have the intimate experience of this connection between God and the word which expresses Him, therefore of His presence in His Name.

“Two Unequal Heredities”

When a seeker plans to pass from one religious form to another, and this in view of the *religio perennis* and not through conversion, it can happen that he comes up against his religious heredity—whether this be conceptual or psychic—due to the fact that his forefathers have practiced that religion over the centuries; and the seeker will be tempted to believe that this heredity is insurmountable, thus that it has about it something absolute; while in reality it is relative by the fact that there is, in the depths of the soul, another heredity which is absolute because it is primordial and which is, precisely, the *religio perennis*. This deep-seated heredity is like the remembrance of the lost Paradise, and it can erupt in the soul by a kind of providential *atavism*; we have in mind here men who, while having behind them generations of religious believers impregnated with a given religious formalism, nevertheless benefit personally from the primordial heredity.

The *religio perennis* comprises essentially the following elements:

Discernment between the Real and the illusory, the Absolute and the relative, God and the world; and, by way of consequence, Discernment of the roots or the prefigurations of the relative in the Absolute, and of the reflections of the Absolute within relativity;

Sincere and persevering Concentration on the Real, by means of the Orison;

Conformity of the soul to the Real, that is to say beauty of soul or the virtues; the essence of this beauty being the sense of the Sacred. One could also say that beauty of soul is on the one hand Faith, with all its consequences, and on the other hand Adoration, with all its consequences.

Equally forming a part of the *religio perennis*—by way of consequence—is the sense of forms under the threefold relationship of beauty, symbolism, and sacramentality; whether the forms be those of

virgin nature, including creatures, or of sacred art, or of artisanship in the broadest sense. For art is man; and man is Devotion.

Logic or integrity of the intelligence; of the will; of the soul; of the ambience.

“Against Subtle Worldliness”

There is an outer man and an inner man; the first lives in the world and undergoes its influence, whereas the second looks towards God and lives in Prayer. Now it is necessary that the outer man not affirm himself to the detriment of the inner man; it is the inverse which must take place. Instead of inflating the outer man and allowing the inner man to die, it is necessary to allow the inner man to expand, and to entrust the cares of the outer to God. Prayer is there in order to re-establish the equilibrium.

Who says outer man says preoccupations of the world, or even worldliness: in effect there is in every man a tendency to attach himself too much to this or that element of passing life or to worry about it too much, and the adversary takes advantage of this in order to cause troubles for us. There is also the desire to be happier than one is, or the desire not to suffer any injustices, even harmless ones, or the desire always to understand everything, or the desire never to be disappointed; all of this is of the domain of subtle worldliness, which must be countered by serene detachment, by the principial and initial certainty of That which alone matters, then by patience and confidence. When no help comes from Heaven, this is because it is a question of a difficulty which we can and must resolve with the means which Heaven has placed at our disposal. In an absolute way, it is necessary to find our happiness in Prayer; that is to say that it is necessary to find therein sufficient happiness so as not to allow ourselves to be excessively troubled by the things of the world, seeing that dissonances cannot but exist, the world being what it is.

There is the desire not to suffer any injustices, or even simply not to be placed at a disadvantage. Now one of two things: either the injustices are the result of our past faults, and in this case our trials exhaust this causal mass; or the injustices result from our character, and in this case our trials bear witness to it; in both cases, we must thank God and pray to Him with all the more fervor, without preoccupying ourselves with worldly chaff. One must also say to oneself that the grace of the Remembrance of God compensates infinitely for every dissonance from which we can suffer, and that in relation to this grace, the inequality of terrestrial favors is a pure nothingness. Let us never forget that an infinite grace compels us to an infinite gratitude, and that the first stage of gratitude is the sense of proportions.

“Beauty”

“God is beautiful and He loves beauty” (hadīth).

Beauty must have in itself a spiritual function, otherwise there would be no beauty.

This function is interiorization. The aesthetic emotion mingles with invocatory prayer; and this interiorizing alchemy confers the capacity to resist temptation.

Beauty may lead to passion and sin, but in the case of contemplative persons—of saints like Ramakrishna—it has led to ecstasy. This is the mystery of *darshan*: of union with an archetypical reality through sensory perception.

The interiorization of beauty presupposes nobility and produces nobility.

Given the spiritual degeneration of mankind, the highest possible degree of beauty, that of the human

body, plays no role in ordinary piety; but this theophany may be a support in esoteric spirituality, as is shown in Hindu and Buddhist sacred art. Nudity means inwardness, essentiality, primordiality and thus universality; clothing signifies social function, and in this framework the sacerdotal function as well. Nudity means glory, radiation of spiritual substance or energy; the body is the form of the essence and thus the essence of the form.

But there is not visual beauty only; poetry, music, and dance are likewise means of interiorization; not in themselves, but combined with the remembrance of the Sovereign Good.

Where there is Truth

Where there is Truth, there is Salvation.

Where there is Certitude, there is Peace.

Where there is Prayer, there is Grace.

Where there is Fervor, there is Victory.

It has been said: "Where his treasure is, there is his heart." May man recognize his treasure in Truth and in Prayer, with his whole heart!

What Constitutes Man?

First: knowledge of God.

Second: will to salvation.

Third: love of the neighbor.

When we say: man is characterized by totality of knowledge, this means: by the knowledge of God.

When we say: man is characterized by freedom of will, this means: by the will to salvation.

When we say: man is characterized by compassion of soul, this means: by love of the neighbor.

The sufficient reason for man is that of which he alone is capable, and which constitutes the essential.

To be with God

Be with God in life; God will be with thee in death.

Be with God in time; God will be with thee in Eternity.

* * *

“Remember Me; I will remember you.”

Four Counsels That Contain All

First: resign yourself to the Will of God. Resign yourself to the situation in which you find yourself for as long as you cannot escape it, just as you must resign yourself to everything that is unavoidable, beginning with what you yourself are.

Second: trust in the Mercy of God. Stand before God with a pure heart; all else is in His Hands.

Third: be active for God. Call upon Him, for speech is man's first act, even as it is the first act of God.

Fourth: abide in the inward. Make your inward part your dwelling; for “the kingdom of God is within you.”

Resignation; Trust; Activity; Inwardness.
